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The Yeoman

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Charles Kennett Burrow



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The Yeoman

By the Same Author

ASTECK'S MADONNA
THE WAY OF THE WIND
THE FIRE OF LIFE
THE LIFTED SHADOW
PATRICIA OF THE HILLS

The Yeoman

Br

CHARLES KENNETH BURROW

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First Edition, March, 1904.

Set up and Electrotyped by

J. J. Little & Co., New York, U. S. A.

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The Yeoman

Chapter I

A Son of Earth

A LONG curved line, the shoulder of the downs, stood dark against a fading sunset. The ridge shut off, as with a screen, the lower brilliances of colour, so that only a few outskirt clouds were visible, pale rose upon a depth of green so tender that in its very transitoriness it suggested an eternity; the beauty which, having once existed and been seen, remains for ever. You saw, and in a moment were aware of change; a chain of cloudlets, flung up like blossoms from an invisible hand, took a tone of grey and drew together; the green passed into blue with the quiver of a star in it; the ridge grew sharp-outlined and black.

On the hither side of the downs twilight fell rapidly, but if you climbed the gradual ascent to the ridge you saw below a space of country still lit and bathed in colour, though with every instant gaining remoteness and that sense of distance which is peculiar to fading, rather than to increasing, light. Beyond lay the sea, still bright with gold in the line of the last flash of sunlight, but to north and south hiding its ripples in a purple mist. The sound of it was no more than such a murmur as thrills through a pine forest under a summer breeze, a sound suggestive of strength in slumber, of peace gathering force for war.

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At the foot of the downs, on the land side of the ridge, the tilth began, fields belonging to Richard Winstone, of Melworthy Farm. The Winstones were a yeoman family, for many generations owning land, born on the land, living by the land. The land was in their blood and bones. Up to five and twenty years before not one of them had left it. Even then it was only a cousin of the Richard Winstone at that time in possession of Melworthy, a son of another branch, owning a smaller place two miles away across the valley. He had sold the farm, the furniture, every stick and stone, and gone to Australia, there to invest his capital in sheep-farming. For this, old Richard never forgave him, the more particularly as the land went to strangers. He had offered to buy it himself, but on such terms of gradual payment as would have been useless to David Winstone, so the place was sold by auction and a new name came into the parish lists. The present Richard had taken over the old grudge with his father's property; accounts of David's success and increasing fortune did nothing to lessen it. Such wealth, he considered, was ill-gotten; it was a Winstone's business to remain upon the Winstone land, even if he starved there. Perhaps he felt the more bitter because his own farm did not pay as it had done once; there seemed more work to do and less profit to show for it. Besides, labourers were not so contented as they had been; they had ideas about improved cottages, gained partly, he suspected, from the young priest at East

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Melworthy. He hated priests of that type. Old Father Byrne, Father Cathcart's predecessor, had let things rest as he found them, but this man was for ever on the watch, both for those of his own faith and for others. Richard Winstone was a Protestant, a hard Protestant, although he had lived in friendliness with the Roman Catholic colony at East Melworthy which had gathered about the great house of Hamer. He had nothing to say against the Hamers; they were privileged, little princes, older on the land than the Winstones, and, of course, of purer blood. The Winstones were yeomen only, not gentlemen, but as to pride—well, a yeoman had his standard.

But even David Winstone, it appeared, could not withstand the call of home, so he was coming back. He had bought a great estate at West Melworthy, which had been in the market for some time; for months past workmen had been busy about the house, and London furnishers had been sending in van-loads of goods. Richard had refused to superintend matters for his cousin on the ground that he knew nothing about such grand affairs. David had asked him merely out of kindness and good fellowship, and had been prepared to pay for many mistakes. The two had met only twice since the somewhat unhappy parting five and thirty years before, when both were hardly more than boys.

Richard Winstone was pacing heavily up and down a narrow cart lane which divided two of his

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fields. On either side was a low stone wall, no higher than his waist. Below, as darkness settled down, he saw the lights strike out from the windows of his house; above, rose that curved black shoulder of the down with the gathering stars above it. A great silence brooded over the country; the keen spring air, saturated with life, was quite still. Winstone was acutely conscious of the life, although his thoughts were filled with bitterness and death, for that day he had buried his wife. That day, also, his cousin David was to take possession of the new house.

It seemed to him that the two things were connected in some mysterious way; not that his loss was the other's gain, he was too hardly logical to take such an impossible woman's view as that. But there was the biting fact that before the earth had settled above his wife David was to come, into his own indeed, but an own purchased and not inherited, land that strangers had tilled. If he had returned, an unsuccessful, broken man, to take up the burden of life on the old farm, Richard would have welcomed him as a prodigal and with as much tenderness as his nature could show. As it was, he resented his coming at all; it was a burr to tease the open wound of his sorrow; it suggested festival in the house of mourning.

Winstone had loved his wife. For a day and night after her death he had felt his reason totter, yet it is doubtful whether she had ever realised his love. She was a woman who had hungered for

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the outward expressions of affection, for the ritual of love; she had been condemned to starve on the bare essentials. It was impossible to blame him; any demonstration would have been false, against his nature—she knew it, yet starved none the less. Her's was a life that limped. The winning part of the woman in her, the pretty lightness, the graces, the change in constancy, were wasted, thrown back upon herself, so that with years she had taken on the look of one who expects nothing. Her only child, a girl, had naturally suffered in such an atmosphere. She had seen that her mother's sudden outbursts of caressing affection were always checked when her father appeared; she had come gradually to understand her mother's look and ways; she had herself learnt that dangerous art of repression,—dangerous, because she had her father's blood to reckon with in conjunction with her mother's softer strain. Therefore, with her, an apparent calmness was often the cloak to a bewildering stress of passion,—the inner fires glowed beneath a surface still as a lake. She respected her father, she gave him so much affection as he would accept; more than that was beyond her. Winstone saw in her the essence of himself, softened to the capacity of a woman; he had a pride in her that found expression in a certain candid, almost brutal, confidence. Indeed, it is doubtful whether he ever regarded her as a girl subject to the ordinary snares and conditions of her sex. She was his child, part of the Winstone tradition.

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It was curious that tradition and the land, always the land, moved him more than any intimate human feeling; with one he had sympathy, with the other merely intercourse. His sorrow for the loss of his wife, indeed, was personal and real, but largely mingled with it was the fact that she was not past child-bearing and had left him no son. He had seen the face of a son, and lost it; it was hidden with the mother in the new grave. Therefore the name of Winstone, except on David's side, would die out. David had two sons. This thought, as he paced between his fields, brought a burning to his eyes which, in another man, might have eased itself in tears.

The lights below grew brighter with increasing darkness, the stars above the ridge and overhead quickened and multiplied into a dust of light. To Winstone's trained eye objects became clear. He could distinguish the grey tower of the church, the white curve of the road sweeping round towards West Melworthy, the familiar lines of the valley, his own fields, broken patches of wood and dark masses of cover. He felt lonely; the experience was new and therefore to be combated. It was a man's business to be sufficient unto himself.

Presently he was aware of a step plodding towards him, and he made out the figure of Job Flower, his farm bailiff. The man walked with the stubborn heaviness born of constant contact with the soil.

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"Meäster, Miss Dorcas do want 'ee. Supper's laid an' waitin'."

"Very well, Job." Winstone turned to re-commence his steady march.

"Couldn' 'ee come now, zir?"

"I shall come when I'm ready." Job did not follow him, but raised his voice to reach the retreating figure.

"The little maid's alwoän, zir. Maybe, zir, you didn' know she were alwoän."

Winstone stopped and faced Job again. "She's best alone. I daresay she's crying. . . . Was she crying?"

"'Er 'ad bin," said Job; "'er 'ad bin, sure, but 'er wasn't when I come out."

"What was she doing?"

"A zittin' all alwoän like an' readin' in a book."

"What book?"

"I doän't rightly know, zir. 'Twere a little book."

"Say I shall be down presently."

"Do 'ee come now, zir, do 'ee. 'Tis tarr'ble twoänsome yere. A bit o' vittles, there, 'tis won'er-vul good vor a sore heart!"

"You mean well, Job."

"Vor sure I do, meäster, aye, so well's a man could. With 'ee all my days I've a-bin. An' when I do teäke the liberty to speak 'tis vor your good an' the little maid's."

Job Flower was the only man who would have

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dared to face his master on such a night. He stood his ground, not without fear, but bravely.

"You talk of the girl as though she were a child."

"A maid's more tender'n a man, zir. 'Er's growded up now, vor sure, vine and lissom—but there, 'er's tarr'ble young vor sorrow."

The sound of wheels on the West Melworthy road drew both their eyes in that direction. The white line of it was hidden for a moment by the passage of two or three carriages.

Master and servant, standing so far apart that neither could read the other's face, gazed silently till the white road shone clear again and the sound passed into a faint hum behind a tree-crowned knoll. The sight represented to Richard the home-coming of an enemy of his own blood; nor was this a deliberate self-deception, for, in David's place, he felt that he would have cherished no particular kindliness for one still faithful to his upbringing and the land,—a man, as it were, reeking of the soil, untrimmed, unpolished, a mere yeoman. And then, he had seen the last of so much that day; he seemed thrust earthward, bound, left to fight alone. He had not written to David concerning his wife's death. This silence had been prompted partly by the devil of pride, and partly, let us say, by its angels; the best and worst had both contributed. But, as he heard the sound of the wheels die away, there flashed into his brain a sardonic comparison between the lighted and

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happy welcome to which they journeyed and the narrow house which had swallowed so much of his hope a few hours before.

"There'll be girt doin's at Melworthy Court now, zir."

"I suppose so."

"I do yere that Meäster David Winstone be main gen'rous."

"Then if he wants a bailiff you can apply for the job." Flower did not mind a cut so long as he could rouse his master; he considered snarling a hopeful sign.

"Well I should look meäkin' a change! So long's you'm yere I'm yere, 'cept you do turn me adrift."

Richard said nothing; he knew that he held Job by bonds too powerful to be loosened by any but the master will.

"Mid I tell Miss Dorcas you'm a comin' direc'ly, zir?"

"I'm coming now."

He took a last look round, his eyes resting particularly on the church tower and the West Melworthy road, and then struck across the fields towards the lighted windows. Job Flower tramped behind, wondering vaguely in his narrow mind how much regret any woman was worth. Devotion to a master he understood, even devotion to his master's daughter, but women in the lump were poor creatures and a weakness to a man.

A hundred yards from the house Job turned aside with a "Good night, zir," towards his own

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abode, there to get rid of the mourning black he wore, and so to sleep. Winstone nodded to his salutation without speaking—that was often his way—and walked on.

Dorcas sat alone, still reading; when her father entered she looked up. Her eye-lids were red, but no longer wet; her eyes very bright, as though the tears had purged them.

“ You’re late, father,” she said, laying down the book.

“ Yes,” he answered. “ Did you hear carriages just now? ”

“ No.”

“ David has come.”

“ Are you cold, father? ”

“ No, child. . . . I said David had come.”

“ Yes,” she answered, with a question in the tone.

“ The old Winstones must go down before the new, eh? ”

“ Why should they? We stand for the old stock.” It was a phrase of Richard’s.

“ But wealth buys everything.”

“ No, nothing! ” she cried. “ Can it buy affection, could it buy Job Flower? Money, money, money! Why, what is it? David’s welcome to his money! ”

“ Well spoken, Dorcas. Remember that . . . We’re alone now.”

The words struck home with a pathos he had not intended; a storm of tears shook the girl, sob fol-

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lowing sob chokingly. She longed to be embraced, to feel another heart against her own, to cry "Mother!" and be answered from anywhere and anyhow. Instead she caught at emptiness; the sense of loneliness became a battlefield for two opposing parts of her; her blood thrilled with something that was not sorrow even while sorrow brimmed to flood.

Winstone watched her in some amazement; tears he had expected, but not such an outburst in his presence; he was sorry for her, profoundly sorry, but as incapable of giving comfort as a stranger. When she raised her head the book was wet with tears. He took it up, wiped it with his sleeve, and laid it aside without glancing at the title. If he had opened it he might have read upon the fly-leaf the name of Eustace Hamer written in a boyish hand.

Chapter II

Visitors at the Farm

DORCAS lived in a narrow world. The human circle was so small that she had only to think and she leapt beyond it, and she had much time for thought. Her education had, perhaps, been as good as that bestowed upon most girls; four or five years at a dame-school in Chesterton, the nearest town, and three at a Bristol boarding-school. By the time she was sixteen her school days were over.

She came home to take up the duties which her mother was only too glad to relinquish. It occurred to neither parent to consult her as to what was to be done with her life,—they assumed that absolute right of possession and command characteristic of people when dealing with their own flesh. She was to be what they had been. It is possible that Richard might have had some ambition for a son; he might even have allowed him so much freedom as would have ruined his hope of binding him to the land. A girl was different. All a girl could do was to marry,—but he had no wish to see Dorcas married. At best it would mean leaving his property to be added to the credit of her husband's name, at worst, after he was gone, the dispersal of it. In view of the latter contingency he had stipulated, in a will made years before, when the hope of a son was almost dead in him, that Dorcas should have no power of sale over

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the estate, but, if she had male issue, it should go to her eldest son on condition that he took the name of Winstone.

The girl's duties, as has been said, gave her much time for thought; the domestic management of a farm is mainly a matter of routine, subject to common-sense. It makes no particular call either upon the intellect or imagination; both may roam at will. Nor, with Dorcas, was any very active call made upon her body; the affairs of the place were conducted in a manner that became a yeoman, a holder of title deeds. She had, indeed, in that yearning for activity which is youth's prerogative, protested that she could manage with fewer maids. She made the request on the ground of economy, a plea that failed with Richard, the more particularly as it had reason. To allow the world to see that things were not quite well with him would be to take the world too much into his confidence.

Such friends as the girl had were mainly school-friends, with whom she kept up some correspondence. But such communications in themselves, and apart from hand-to-hand human intercourse, do not conduce to a balanced outlook upon life. Tone begets tone, inexperience speaking to inexperience may gradually delude itself into the semblance of knowledge, particularly in matters of sentiment and the heart, where blood, rather than reason, speaks. To girls, especially, the world is a book of few leaves, but those few printed in decisive colours and

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mainly consisting of negations. To Dorcas, perhaps, this was less so than to many girls, although, on the other hand, she had fewer means of guiding and correcting impressions than they. Therefore she turned to nature, and in natural things found some expression of herself and a magic rainbow-hued and of the essence of freedom.

On the morning following the day of the funeral Dorcas rose with the feeling that a new life had begun. Between to-day and yesterday was a difference sharp as between light and shadow, though with another significance. The discipline of sorrow to the young, and particularly such sorrow as springs from loss, closes one door to open others. It is a master-key, giving access to new worlds and possibilities.

She looked from her window into the heart of spring. The green of young wheat answered to the deeper green of sloping meadows, the chestnuts were alight with blossom, the hedges white with May. She leant out to drink the dewy fragrance, taking deep breaths like a man who stands beyond his prison walls. It was her return to light and beauty after days given over to watching and the nursing of a waning flame. The shadow of death passed from her; its horror and darkness were merged into something having affinity with this new day, so perfect, so rich in promise, so brave in sunlight. She experienced a subdued rapture which linked her firmly to the comforting things of earth.

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After breakfast her father went out, as usual. He discussed the daily matters with her, making no reference to the past, and was satisfied to find Dorcas perfectly composed. A shower of tears after he had gone left her bright-eyed and more certain of herself,—she had to pay the penalty for the hardly understood exaltation of the morning. Then she went about her usual work of superintendence, wondering that ordinary things looked the same.

She was called from the dairy by news of visitors, brought by a maid whose face shone with a kind of expectant pride.

"Miss Dorcas," she said, "'tis Meäster David Winstone, vrom Melworthy Court, wi' his lady. They've a-walked over."

"Why shouldn't they walk, Lizzie?"

"Wi' all they carr'ges?" Dorcas laughed.

"Silly girl," she said, "do you suppose they're afraid to use their legs?"

"His lady's tarr'ble good-lookin', Miss Dorcas."

"Hush, don't talk so much!"

"They come drough yields. I zeed their veet all wetted!"

Dorcas left the girl to impart her bewilderment to the others, and went to meet these cousins of hers. David she had seen once before when he paid a flying visit to the Court, during its preparation,—but the wife and family were strangers to her. She had imbibed some of her father's prejudice, but still kept an open mind,—latterly she had

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found herself able to judge her father, and his views did not always commend themselves to her naturally quick perception. Her heart beat with some confusion as she opened the door.

David came forward to meet her, holding out both hands.

"Cousin Dorcas," he said, "I've brought my wife to see you at the earliest moment. Believe me, if I had known——"

Mrs. Winstone kissed the girl and kept one of her hands. "My dear, if we had known I should have been with you yesterday. Perhaps your father's letter miscarried." She drew Dorcas to a sofa beside her.

"He did not write," she said, blushing at the confession.

"When I heard last night, quite by accident, I was more pained than I can tell you. For us it was a day of rejoicing—for you! Well, well, we won't speak of it now, my child."

"Father is out."

"Out early was always Richard's way. Indeed, it was a habit with all us Winstones."

"He'll be back to dinner," said Dorcas, feeling strangely awkward. It was on her tongue to ask them to stay, but the thought of Richard's displeasure held her silent.

"Perhaps we shall find him about the farm. I want to show my wife everything,—all the old places. Directly I get into this native air again my memory begins to work. I don't believe I've

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forgotten anything. I remembered the field path this morning, didn't I, Madge?"

"Every step of it, David." He laughed and clasped his hands behind his head.

"How it all came back! A man can't forget England,—he has every drop of his blood ready to cry out for it. When I was first out there, in a lonely station, with only the same few faces day after day and those not all pleasant ones, I believe I was in England half the time! Some word, or smell, or colour would send me back to Melworthy post haste, and on my honour I could hear the old chaps talking at lunch under the hedge! . . . To think that I should come back and settle at Melworthy Court! Why, I hardly believe it yet!"

"It's true, though. Dorcas, you must come to us often. We're not very good hands at making friends, I think,—new friends."

"And one's own blood always comes first," said David.

"My dear, you're very quiet," Mrs. Winstone said. "Look at me. . . . Those are good honest eyes,—yes; and a forehead with brains inside, and quite beautiful hair. You must learn to love me; I have no daughter."

Dorcas blushed, and on an impulse kissed the kind face. Mrs. Winstone was a woman of rare simplicity of heart, of sound sense, of strong and constant affections, together with a happy freedom from restraint and power of commanding love,—such a woman as our colonies produce for the com-

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fort and satisfaction of the mother-land as well as their own.

"That's right," she said. "We shall love each other, shan't we?"

"Yes." The word fell very softly from trembling lips.

"My child!" The girl's head was drawn to Margaret's bosom, and rested there. "Of course we shall love each other very much. I knew it directly I saw you. I always prayed that I might have a daughter, and God has sent her to me at last."

"Mrs. Winstone——"

"Cousin Madge, please,—or just Madge will do."

"Cousin Madge, if I don't always seem——"

"Yes, my dear?"

"—To, to love you, it won't be my fault. Please understand that."

A glance passed between husband and wife over the girl's bowed head.

"I shall always try to understand you, Dorcas."

"Trust Madge," said David, heartily.

"You see," Dorcas went on, rather breathlessly, "I'm very busy here,—I shall be busier than ever now—and if I don't see you very often you mustn't think——" She paused again.

"I shall think nothing but good of you, my child."

"Father hates the idea of being disturbed," Dorcas said, struggling for an explanation, "he

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doesn't care for visitors. And now, perhaps,—I think he'll like them less than ever."

"Richard was always too reserved," David said.
"It's bad for a man, it makes him brood."

"But he must think of Dorcas," said Margaret, "as no doubt he will. Yes, he must think of Dorcas."

"He does think of Dorcas," Richard's voice grated harshly. He was standing on the path outside the open window, looking in. Dorcas's face flamed and she made a movement to draw away from Margaret, but checked it, and remained embraced.

"Why, Richard, of course you do," cried David.
"Your hand, man! I've brought my wife to see you."

Richard bowed awkwardly; then he left the window and came round into the room. He was dressed in working clothes, his boots were heavy with soil which left a track as he moved. He appeared to accentuate the outward signs of his devotion to the land.

"I came to see if I could help Dorcas," said Margaret.

"Thanks, she has everything at her finger-ends."

"I hardly meant in that way," said Margaret, in her direct manner. "I'm sure she's a perfect housekeeper. But she needs companionship and friends."

"She will tell you that she has friends."

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"She shall tell me all about them soon."

"Of course she will tell you all about everything, Madge," cried David. "In a few days, when we're settled down, you can have a week of confidences. . . . So, Richard, you still stick by the farm?"

"I always shall."

"Right, quite right. I find it heaven to be home again. No country like this, Richard, eh? I shall farm as well, you know. The instinct's too strong in me to let me rest."

"I suppose you'll play at farming now?" Richard made no effort to conceal his indifference.

"Play! Why play? A man can't play at what has been his trade for thirty years! Besides, I've too much respect for land to treat it badly. I shall farm to pay, cousin. If I can't make it pay I shall let the farm-land off and become a lazy land-owner!"

"We shall be rivals, then." Richard said this with a note of satisfaction.

"Why, yes, if every farmer is a rival to his neighbour. It keeps up the quality of things, eh? And I'm sure you're not afraid!"

"Oh, no," said Richard. "I'm not afraid."

"My son Ford, too, has a passion for the land; it's in the blood, Richard, we can't get away from it, and I'm glad to see it in my eldest boy. Even that Melbourne University didn't knock it out of him. The youngest has different tastes. We shall have him turn parson or lawyer, I expect."

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"You'll let him go his own way?" asked Richard.

"Certainly. Children will go their own way, so we'd better help them along it if it's honest. They're only ours for a time."

Richard glanced at Dorcas with a smile that seemed to ask, "Is that true?" But her head was turned aside and she did not see it.

"Well, you'll come to see us soon, Richard,—if I may call you Richard?" said Margaret.

"Thanks,—when I have time."

"Time!" cried David. "Of course you'll have time! You'll bring him, won't you, Dorcas?"

"I'll ask him to bring me." She said it dutifully, but in her heart were the beginnings of revolt.

"Come soon, my dear,—to-morrow, any time. The boys will want to see you. If you don't come I shall send them to fetch you." Margaret kissed Dorcas tenderly and was glad to feel an answering pressure against her lips.

At dinner Richard had questions to ask and advice to give, the latter taking the form of assertion.

"How long were they here?"

"Half an hour, perhaps."

"No longer?"

"I think not."

"That was long enough."

"They wish to be friendly, father."

"Evidently. But I suspect David's friendliness."

The Yeoman

"I believe you are unjust!" Dorcas cried.

"We shall see. He begins by starting a rival farm."

"But that is his business! Besides, you can hold your own against anyone."

"I think so." He smiled grimly.

"I'm sure he would never do you any injury. To look at Mrs. Winstone is to be sure she's good and kind."

"So you're going to side with them against me?"

"Father! Why should there be any question of such a thing?"

"You don't understand," he said. "I wish you to have as little to do with them as possible,—nothing if you can manage it."

"I've promised to be Mrs. Winstone's friend. I like her."

"Mrs. Winstone won't pine without your friendship."

He watched her narrowly, confident of victory. She had never opposed him before, and he saw no reason to suppose that she would now. He argued without knowledge of the awakened woman in her.

"We must keep apart," he went on, in his slow, heavy way, with a suggestion of west country speech impossible to reproduce. "They are rich, they'll go everywhere. People must visit them, even the Hamers——"

"The Hamers!" She drew a quick breath and pressed an arm to her side.

The Yeoman

“Yes; why not the Hamers?”

“We know the Hamers.”

“They know us if they meet us on the road.
But were we ever asked to the Castle?”

“No.”

“David will be. You can see the difference?”
Dorcas nodded. She saw the difference as fire to shadow compared with her father’s appreciation of it.

“I am a yeoman farmer,” he went on, “David is one of the biggest landowners in the county and farms for pleasure. The Winstones are divided.”

“We are as good as they.”

“Of course, and we shall keep so. I daresay David would lift us up with him,—lift us up who’ve never left the land! I’d die first!”

“Father!”

“Let it be straight and plain. I’d rather die first!”

With that he left Dorcas to her own thoughts, thoughts which made such a tumult in her mind that to calm them she put on a hat and ran into the open air. Outside the gate she turned to the left, climbed the ridge, and struck into a narrow pathway between banks yellow with gorse. The path ended in a cup of verdure, beyond whose western rim the sea winked in sunlight far below. There she threw herself down, and with chin propped on folded hands tried to shut out everything save the beautiful familiarity of what she saw.

The arms of the cove were visible, white-sanded

The Yeoman

and glittering, the inner curve being hidden; to the right stretched the cliff downs, running green to meet blue sky, a sea of grass to match the sea below; to the left a slightly descending slope gave a greater sense of distance. On that side, in a sheltered coombe, was Melworthy Castle, on the other, a mile inland, Melworthy Court, newer, but still of a respectable antiquity. She strove to shut them both out by a fixed gaze seaward, but neither that, nor hidden eyes, could clear her mind. After a time, resigning a useless battle, she thought of both, and in spite of a lowering future, her spirit rose and spread wings towards freedom. She even smiled to see the stretch of far horizons, and laughed to feel the pulse of ardent life, until a sight of the black dress she wore brought her back to earth.

In the meantime David and Margaret had returned to the Court, talking much of Dorcas by the way.

"A sweet child," Mrs. Winstone said, "and with a will of her own that has been made too little use of. That cousin of yours, David, doesn't like us."

"He's a queer fellow, but he'll come round."

"I doubt it."

"You must make him for the girl's sake."

"There'll be battles in that house. . . .

She's dangerously pretty."

"Is she? I didn't notice it, Madge. You see, I only have eyes for you."

"I almost believe you. . . . A strange

The Yeoman

thing neither of us said a word to him about his loss,—I can't recall a word."

"No, you're right,—not a word. He repels sympathy."

"Dorcas will starve there. It's a hard thing to come between father and child, but for her sake it must be done, I think."

"There's Ford. Here, boy!"

Ford Winstone came to meet them, swinging out of the shadow of a group of beeches across a sunny lawn. His face was flushed and eager, boyishly delighted.

"This is a glorious place!" he cried. "I've been exploring. There's no country like England,—I can see that after a month of it. . . . How's the bear?"

"Not particularly pleasant," said David. "But, Ford, his cub's a beauty."

"The girl?"

"There's only one."

"Why didn't you bring her up, dad?"

"She'll come soon. If not, you shall go down to bring her. Where's Steve?"

"In the library."

"On a day like this? What a boy he is!" said Margaret.

"I've been learning the dialect from John Winter, mother. 'Look'ee zee, young zir,' he says, 'look'ee zee at thic girt woäk; an' did'ee ever zet eyes on a viner beech than theäse; 'tis a hunderd 'ear wold, I'll be boun'."

The Yeoman

“Did ‘er zay that?” cried the delighted David.
“Wull, wull! You’m a gettin’ on, bwoy. ’Tis the
true Do’set talk, aye, vor sure, seäme’s I did know
thirty ‘ear agoo! ’Tis better ’n book English, eh,
Madge?”

“Barbarous!” said Margaret, taking Ford’s
arm.

Chapter III

Father Cathcart's Charge

THE Hamers were a family whose history is written broad upon the west, and, in a smaller degree, upon the world outside it,—a commoner family, envious of no titles, because they had been offered and refused more than once. Perhaps they were sound rather than brilliant, giving to the service of the State soldiers, sailors, politicians, who could be relied on to do their duty with stiff backs and faces to the enemy. So far as I am aware no member of the family ever made an overwhelming noise in the world, though, running down the pedigree, I could put my finger upon a score whose names stand for solid worth in the records of their time. A certain Gerald Hamer, in the early years of King Charles I., published a somewhat startling treatise upon the Philosopher's Stone, founded, in part, upon "the courteous revelations of spirits," which contained a great deal more poetry than philosophy and more mysticism than either. His was the only contribution made to literature by the family. A copy of the work was preserved in the library of the Castle, with manuscript notes by the author, but it is not on record that they boasted of it,—a piece of reticence to be appreciated by those who have suffered at the hands of one-author families. The Hamers boasted of nothing,—which is by no means to say that they had no pride.

The Yeoman

As a Roman Catholic family in a Protestant community their position was somewhat difficult, but as they had been settled at Melworthy Castle for ten or a dozen generations, and had always held the same faith, the county accepted them as a matter of course. It may be remarked that in this the county consulted its own interest, for though the Hamers were a good deal to the county, the county was nothing to them. They could stand unsupported; supremely hospitable, their hospitality was for such as chose to accept it; they had a princely way with them which only acknowledged favours from inferiors or dependents, consequently they were a little feared by their equals and devotedly loved by their tenants and servants.

No picturesque curse was attached to the name, no ban of sterility, no haunting of spirits. With the latter only the aforesaid Gerald had had unsatisfactory converse, and he died at a venerable age with the words of the Viaticum in his ears. The estate had descended in the direct line; they were not a prolific race, but always the torch had been handed on, burning clearly, to the time of which I write, when Herbert Hamer reigned. He had a son Eustace, and a daughter, Geraldine; it was due to the author of the treatise that this name should be preserved, though decorously, and in the female form. Geraldine, however, preferred the more familiar Dolly; the former smacked of reproof. The mother died at the girl's birth.

Father Cathcart, pacing the library at Mel-

The Yeoman

worthy Castle with the index finger of his right hand between the leaves of a book, glanced now and then towards his pupil with a smile that had a hint of bewilderment in it. Eustace's attention was obviously not upon his work; his hair had been tossed to wildness by nervous fingers, his eyes travelled up and down a page which was never turned, and he bit the back of his knuckles until blood threatened. Father Cathcart watched and waited; he knew the young man.

Eustace closed the book with a snap and pushed it away, scattering pen and paper at the same time.

"Hang Aristotle!" he said. "What's the earthly use of Aristotle? Theocritus, now, or Horace, there's some sense in them!"

"We read them for rather different purposes, don't we?" asked Father Cathcart, drily.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. I say, old chap, can't you let me off to-day?"

"Certainly, if you like. I can't quite treat you as a schoolboy now."

"You're awfully good to me," said Eustace, taking the priest's arm and walking up and down with him. "You take far more trouble with me than I'm worth."

"Nonsense! What's wrong with you this morning?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"You used to be fond of books. I thought I should succeed in making a scholar of you."

The Yeoman

“ I dare say you will some day. But, after all, what’s the good of being a scholar? I don’t mean to hurt you, old fellow, you couldn’t help being one. I mean you were always so horribly clever. But for me?”

Father Cathcart laughed and pressed the other’s arm affectionately.

“ You don’t hurt me at all, Eustace. Of course, to be nothing more than a scholar is no good at all. But I think it helps you to be a man.”

“ You’re not quite sure about it?”

“ Not quite,—it depends on the individual.”

“ The individual’s always cropping up, isn’t he? What’s right for one man’s wrong for another. It’s a muddling sort of world.”

“ I hope you don’t find it so already.”

“ I do sometimes, honour bright! That chap Aristotle makes your head turn round.”

“ Suppose we drop Aristotle?”

“ Into the sea if you like. Just look out there! What is there in all the philosophers as good as that?”

They paused before a high window and looked out together. Beyond a wide terrace, the ground sloped abruptly seaward to a tiny harbour, rock-ringed and blue as sapphire, in the shadows a kingly purple. A little stream went singing down the coombe and spread itself over an expanse of white sand in twenty rilles, as though to taste freedom with as many mouths. The coombe itself lifted green sides to drink the sun; the drum of

The Yeoman

waves on the outer cliffs made the air cool with its throbbing.

"You're mixing things again, aren't you?" asked Father Cathcart. "The philosophers——"

"Yes, yes, I know! But to-day there are no philosophers."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'd a notion of looking up the Winstones,—at the Court, I mean."

"You seem to have taken to them, Eustace."

"Why, yes. It's all right, isn't it?"

"Certainly. I hold that such people are an honour to their county, just as you are. Mr. Winstone's simplicity and kindness are unbounded, yet he's sharp enough to guard himself from any kind of humbug. Wealth has got into the right hands there."

"I'm glad you like them. Steve and I are going to strike up a friendship,—I can see it coming. He talks of studying with me here for a year or two."

"That might be good for both of you. . . . With a man like Mr. Winstone at my back, and with your father's help, I may manage to get some of my cherished reforms pulled through."

"Decent cottages for the labourers, and all that?"

"Yes,—and all that."

"There'll be a lot of opposition,—the small owners will fight. I've heard of it already."

"I'm not afraid. I know who my chief enemy will be."

The Yeoman

“Who?”

“Richard Winstone.” Eustace started and stepped out on the terrace. Father Cathcart followed him.

“He’s a hard man,” the priest went on, “and harder now than ever. I think he buried the last of his tenderness with his wife. I admit that his position’s awkward, particularly since his cousin came back, but he seems inclined to make the worst of it. I understand he’ll hardly see him at all.”

“That is so,” said Eustace. “You see, he calls himself blunt farmer, he won’t make friends with other people. The county, as it calls itself, will take up David because he made his money abroad,—but Richard, why they may be eating Richard’s butter for all they know! What rot it is! It makes me sick!”

“You’re not the first, my boy! But you must admit a difference between the men themselves.”

“Oh, yes. But it’s hard on Richard’s children.”

“Children? A daughter only, I think.”

“That makes it all the worse,” said Eustace, ignoring the correction.

“It seems so at first sight, but is it really? She has her work to do, she’s used to her surroundings, she’ll marry soon enough.”

“I doubt that,” Eustace interjected.

“Why? I’ve spoken with the girl often. She has beauty,—yes. I should say beauty of rather a telling type. Don’t you think so, Eustace?”

The Yeoman

"Certainly I think so," he answered, candidly, feeling the blood hot in his face.

"And men run after beauty," said Father Cathcart.

"But you insist on ignoring the girl! Men may run after her, as you say, but all the running won't necessarily make her throw her handkerchief to one."

"No." There was a half question in the word. Father Cathcart glanced at Eustace curiously, then laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Ah, well," he said, "we'll hope for the best,—for her, and for my schemes, and all of us. . . . There's your sister, Eustace."

"Dolly!" Eustace hailed her.

She turned and came towards them. In one hand she had a fishing-rod, from the other hung a fishing-basket, the strap twisted round her wrist. Dolly could be Geraldine, or Geraldine Dolly, at will. She could assume a lofty stateliness or relapse into the primitive savagery of girlhood, you never quite knew which to expect. She was a young person universally beloved and might, if her sense of fun had been smaller, have become conceited. As it was, she accounted conceit, according to her limited knowledge of them, the chief of vices. She was not strictly beautiful, not so beautiful as her brother Eustace,—she congratulated herself upon the fact,—but she had a charm of whose effect she was unconscious,—radiant health. From her impatient feet to the hair tinted like leaf

The Yeoman

drift in winter beech hedges, she danced with vitality, almost ached with it. Life moved to music, or set wings, like a yacht at sunrise, to sail in the sun's track.

"Well, child!" she said to Eustace. She was his junior by two years. "Why aren't you at your lessons? Father Cathcart, has he been naughty?"

"I believe he proposed to chuck Aristotle into the sea."

"Happy Aristotle, on a day like this!"

"I suppose you're going to fish," said Eustace.

"It looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but one never knows what to make of you. I wouldn't mind betting——"

"I'm going to fish for a bet. You knew I wanted another horse, didn't you, a hand higher than Admiral?"

"I've heard of nothing else for a week!"

"Shame! Papa's bet me that horse of Richard Winstone's,—the red roan, you know, the one he wants to sell,—that he'll catch more trout than I in three hours."

"The governor's very reckless,—wickedly extravagant, too. Suppose you lose,—what do you give him?"

"Nothing, of course!"

"I see," said Eustace. "That's what I call a fair sort of bet,—a girl's bet."

"It is fair, isn't it, Father Cathcart?"

"Perfectly, I should say, Miss Hamer!"

The Yeoman

“Dolly!” Herbert Hamer strolled round from the north end of the house,—a tall, well-set man, inclining to stoutness, but carrying his weight easily. He was handsome in a hearty English way, with eyes that had in them a touch of melancholy, like a shadow deepening still water. But the general expression of the face was serene and equable,—a man, you would say, firm of purpose, easily resolved, vigorous in action, not readily overborne. He, too, carried rod and basket.

“I thought I heard your chatter,” he said.
“Eustace, are you playing truant?”

“I think of going to the Winstones, sir.”

“Quite right. Don’t work him too hard, Cathcart.”

“Aristotle is to be drowned, papa,” said Dolly.

“Ah! By the way, Eustace, if you happen to come across Richard Winstone, you might tell him to reserve me the refusal of that red roan.”

“Hadn’t I better tell him to send it up? You see, whether Dolly wins or loses she’ll want——”

“No, she won’t!” said Dolly. “But as I’m sure to win, perhaps you might as well ask him to let me try it.”

Hamer laughed. “Perhaps you might do that,” he said. “Come along, tyrant!”

Eustace and Cathcart watched them out of sight and then turned to pace the terrace again.

“She’ll have that horse, you know,” Eustace said.

“Of course she will.”

The Yeoman

"Don't you consider it immoral,—a heads I win, tails you lose, kind of arrangement?"

"Not in the least," said Cathcart, smiling.

"You're a queer chap!"

"You see, Mr. Hamer intends to give her the horse, so what does it matter? Of course, I wouldn't apply the same reasoning to all cases."

"I should think not! What do you say to a sail? It's only eleven o'clock, and I don't want to get up there before lunch."

"I have work to do, Eustace."

"Pooh! You don't give yourself enough rest. Come along."

Father Cathcart looked down at the crimped foam on the sand and then out to sea. It was true that he did not give himself enough rest.

"Well," he said, "for an hour. You're skipper."

Eustace ran down to the little harbour before him, untied a boat, and pulled Cathcart out to the *Eileen*, a one-rater dainty as a seagull. The boy was a born sailor, and when the canvas spread and the water began to gurgle under the bow he became as contented as a cat in sunshine. Cathcart watched his skilful handling of the little craft and mused, and wondered, obeying orders with the precision of a marine. He felt that Eustace was in his keeping even more than in his father's, a responsibility that bore heavily upon a man himself not more than thirty-five. It was a responsibility of vast significance, seeing that he was the only son of his house. The boy had health,—finely strung,

The Yeoman

indeed, but sound,—spirit, and candour,—he thought candour. The affection between them was unmistakable,—he relied on that. Yes, with Eustace before him, with the cool wind on his forehead, with the hissing isolation of the sea about them, he felt that he could trust him to the death.

They drew out and crossed the entrance to Melworthy Cove, where the flowing tide seethed across the bar. The lobster pots piled on the beach looked like children's baskets, the sharp perspective of the village street, widening seaward, blinked white in the sunlight. Eustace stood up and scanned the cliffs. No one was in sight.

Chapter IV

Young Blood

It was two hours before the *Eileen* dropped sail in the harbour, but Father Cathcart did not grumble. He loved to see Eustace in his element; it was a vantage point from which to project his mind into a happy future. He felt secure and light of heart as he stepped ashore.

"You'll find the Winstones in the middle of lunch if you don't hurry," he said.

"That doesn't matter. I can cut over the cliffs,—less than an hour'll do it." He waved his hand and left Father Cathcart to make his way slowly up to the house.

But Eustace did not hurry, for once his feet were on land again his morning restlessness of mind returned. He was twenty-two and began to feel the prick of maturing blood. Life took colour, imagination shaped itself from mere dreams to active possibilities, seeming changed to real. From a boy's vivid, but chaotic, sense of things, from that rare atmosphere which disperses rainbow tints on the unknown, he emerged to discover that clouds were not angels' wings, that earth was earth, that the desire of the eyes was not merely a graceful figure. The change was in kind, not in degree; the awakened senses leapt to direct objects instead of to conjured nothings; in a word, the man in him rose to a consciousness of power. It was only

The Yeoman

natural that knowledge should spring from the touch-stone of a woman.

He climbed to the grassy cup where Dorcas had lain a few weeks before, and looked about him, wondering where she was and why he had not seen her. Searching the ground, his glance fell upon some withered flowers, sun-dried and scentless. With a strange feeling of awkwardness he picked them up, held them in his hand for a moment, and then, with an uneasy laugh, threw them to be scattered piecemeal by the wind. Then he turned, took the path up which she had come, struck round the Cove and so up again for a final descent upon Melworthy Court.

Lunch, as Father Cathcart had predicted, was half over, but a place was immediately laid for him, and he fell to.

"Steve was wanting you," said David, "to discuss this scheme of yours."

"Yes," said Steve. "Can it be worked?"

"I think so. My tutor, Father Cathcart, seems to think well of it."

"Let him teach you everything but theology, Steve," said David. "For all I know, that may be right enough, but it doesn't suit my stomach."

"We'll leave out theology," said Steve, laughing. "Ford, what are you for learning?"

"My course is over. Melbourne finished me. I run the farm."

"You don't look much like a farmer."

The Yeoman

"He has the brains, you see," said Margaret.
"He's a scientific farmer."

"And jolly hard work it is, too," said Ford.
"They're dear people down here, but any change
frightens them to death. I have to lead them like
a pack of children."

"Do you really mean to make it pay?" Eustace
asked.

"Certainly. Why not? I'm putting up a rea-
sonable dairy now."

"I saw some building as I came along."

"Do you know," said Margaret, "I'm rather
sorry for these people. It seems a pity for
strangers to destroy some of their cherished no-
tions."

"We're not strangers!" cried David. "My
dear, it's for their good. If they don't move with
the world the world will crush them. It's a rule
of life."

"The rules of life are often hard," said Mar-
garet, thinking of Dorcas.

"Hard, perhaps, but sound. Besides, look at the
good we're doing the labourers. Those wretched
cottages outside the gates were a disgrace, fever
dens. Down they come!"

"I think my father wants to see you about some
work of the same kind, Mr. Winstone," said Eus-
tace. "He's been slow to move because he feared
to do more harm than good. The people, you see,
are superstitious, and the mean landowners will
work on that. You know the saying down here

The Yeoman

that the devil sleeps in new houses. Some of them would rather live in dog-kennels than risk the meeting."

"I know the breed! But Ford takes them in hand,—he can manage them! You should hear him talk the dialect! He's picked it up amazingly."

"I suppose it was in me, dad."

"But the Winstones never talked it in my day,—no more than a touch. Of course, they could when they wanted to."

"I call it barbarous," said Margaret. "But we're getting away from your improvements. I can't help thinking of other people. What will Cousin Richard Winstone say?"

David looked perplexed and shrugged his shoulders. "I can't make the man out," he said.

"From all I hear," said Ford, "he's said a good deal already, he and that bailiff of his, Job Flower. John Winter brings me stories that I don't like. If only Dorcas could influence him!"

"She's a brave girl," said Margaret, "and does her best, more than most girls would dare to do."

"I know that," said Ford. "She has spoken to me of it. I should call her a noble girl, mother." He spoke with conviction. Margaret nodded and smiled.

"I love her," she said. "You know her, Mr. Hamer?"

"Oh, yes. We were children together in a way. I was allowed to run wild a good deal, and we often met."

The Yeoman

"I should like you to meet her here," said Margaret. "Some time, when we succeed in getting her up, you must come. I have her rather on my mind."

"I shall be delighted to come," said Eustace.

After lunch Steve carried Eustace off to his study, where they talked of books for ten minutes and of other things for two hours. Young Winstone was more of a true student than his new friend, having that genuine love of books which expresses itself in the mere tender handling of them, as living things to be protected and caressed. But that afternoon he was inclined to wander, and they talked lightly of a hundred trivial matters, occasionally surprising each other in serious pauses which had no apparent meaning.

"You fish?" asked Eustace, glancing at an array of rod-cases in a corner.

"Rather. We have no stream here. I was thinking of asking Mr. Hamer to let me fish your water."

"Of course. He's fishing himself to-day. He and my sister have a bet on. If she wins she gets a horse, if she loses she also gets a horse, by way of consolation. You admire the arrangement?"

"Excellent," Steve laughed. "Do you think I might walk over and try my luck now?"

"Certainly, old chap. I'll go half way with you,—I've a call to make. I don't suppose you'll find them fishing now,—it was a three hours' match,—but that doesn't matter."

The Yeoman

"Not at all," said Steve, with an effort at sincerity of tone.

"If a keeper tackles you, give him your name and tell him to come to me."

"If you mean Martin, he knows me."

"Has he caught you poaching already?"

"Well, no—but I had a talk with him last week when I was hanging about near the Castle."

"He's a capital fellow," said Eustace. "He was shot once, you know, but held on to his man like the devil."

"Is there much poaching about here?" Steve asked, selecting a light rod and pocketing a book of flies.

"A good deal in a quiet way. Ready?"

"Yes."

They went out into the golden afternoon, cutting across the park to strike the upper road, which was the nearest way to Richard's farm, but the longest to the Castle. Steve chafed but said nothing.

"Do you like the new life here?" Eustace asked.

"Yes. The queer thing is it doesn't seem new, it's just like coming home. Out there the talk of home is a kind of religion. I knew Melworthy quite well before I saw it; when my father was in the mood he drew maps of the place, marking everything,—the bank where a flock of sheep was buried in the snowdrift in that great winter thirty years ago, Richard Winstone's farm, his own,—the one he sold, you know,—all the cliff-paths, and

The Yeoman

so on. I could have found my way blind-folded to the Court."

"I wish I'd had your experience."

"It's better to have been here all the time."

"I don't mean that I find it dull here, but,—well, one's rather inclined to get into a groove."

They vaulted a gate into the road and were silent for a long time. Neither suspected the other's thoughts.

"I'm awfully glad we're neighbours," Eustace said.

"So am I. You must teach me to handle a boat."

"Yes, I can do that. You shoot?"

"I'm a fair shot. What I miss Ford can bring down afterwards. He's always wiping my eye."

"He seems a great outdoor man."

"He's immense," said Steve.

"We part here. I'm going to see Richard Winstone about the horse my sister's fishing for. You know your way?"

"I knew it long before I saw it."

"Perhaps I shall see you later. The best bit of water is between the fall and the bridge."

"Thanks. Good-bye!" Steve increased his pace and vanished. Eustace turned down towards the farm, walking slowly.

The red roan was not much in his mind as he went; he was mainly occupied with Dorcas and conjecture as to whether he should see her. Young love is not introspective, it does not find fuel within,

The Yeoman

but is rather concerned with the externals of the passion. It makes pictures, imagines scenes to be acted to the music of the heart's orchestra, projects itself no further than the immediate future. It has, in most cases, no clearness of vision, because it sees through mist; it cannot pierce the beautiful glamour of its own creation. Perhaps, apart from personal expression, its crowning idea is of a passionate constancy, which, from its very iteration, accepts the accusation of possible change. Its "I can never alter," presupposes the insinuated, "Wait." The elder world smiles and glances at its past, not unkindly, perhaps, because it sees cases to refute a too rigid rule. Eustace was convinced that he loved Dorcas, and he suspected, from the fact that she had appeared to avoid him, that she loved him. It was natural that she should hesitate.

The sight of a black gown at the door of the house made his feet move more quickly. Dorcas saw him coming and stood still, expecting him to pass the gate; when he opened it and came through it was too late to move.

"Good afternoon," he said, holding out his hand. She took it, answering him in the same words.

"Is Mr. Winstone in, Dorcas?"

"No,—I'm waiting for him."

"I have business with him. Will he be long?"

"I think not. Will you come inside?"

He followed her across a wide hall into the parlour, a large, low room, oak-beamed and furnished in dark Spanish mahogany. An oak cabinet, of true

The Yeoman

Flemish work, gave the room an air of distinction a little marred by the few poor pictures on the walls. Neither Dorcas nor her father had our pseudo-cultivation in matters of art.

Dorcas sat near the window so as to command a view of the gate. Eustace took a place opposite to her.

"Is your business about—" she paused.

"About a horse,—the red roan." She drew a relieved breath.

"I thought it might be about something else."

"What else?" His heart thumped.

She hesitated and then looked at him frankly. "You won't mind my speaking, will you?" she said. "I thought it might be about the new cottages." It was his turn to feel relief.

"Oh, no. Have you heard anything about them?"

"Everyone is talking of it."

"How things get about! Yes, there is such a scheme. I believe my father and the Court people mean to carry it through."

"My father won't hear of it. Please don't speak to him about it."

"But why not?"

"It would be no use,—it would only make him angry."

"Of course, he's under no obligation to make any improvements. Only, if he doesn't, his labourers may grow discontented. Can't you persuade him?"

The Yeoman

"I've spoken,—I can do no more. He fancies,—it sounds foolish, but it's true to him,—that Cousin David Winstone is trying to force his hand."

"I'm sure it isn't really so."

"No,—but he broods and broods about it."

"Don't worry, Dorcas. He'll see, in time, that we only mean well,—all of us."

"If I could think so—"

"Do you doubt us?"

"Not you, but his understanding that you mean well."

"And if he doesn't?"

"I don't know." She spoke very quietly, almost whisperingly, rather to herself than to him; the tone suggested loneliness, a pathetic note in youth. It stirred Eustace more than any discussion of Richard's fancies could do.

"Why haven't I seen you for so long, Dorcas? Not since—"

"The funeral?" she filled in the word.

"Yes. I was up at the Cup this morning."

"I've been there often."

"When?"

"At all times,—but generally in the evening." She did not turn her eyes towards him; they were still fixed on the gate. Her manner piqued him a little; it either indicated indifference or surprising self-control. Neither consortcd with the fluid mood which a day of idleness and nursing thought had induced.

The Yeoman

"It's strange that I should have missed you," he said.

"Yes. . . . Is Cousin David Winstone putting up a new dairy?"

"I believe so. You seem greatly interested in his doings, Dorcas."

"That's natural, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is." After a pause he asked:

"Have you read the book I lent you?"

"Yes. I'll bring it."

She ran up to her bed-room, leaving Eustace to increased wonder at the colourlessness of her tone. He had come with the elation which looks for instant response; instead of that he found himself confronted with a new Dorcas, a girl whom he hardly recognised. The brightness of her had vanished. It appeared strange to him that sorrow could so overshadow youth.

As Dorcas came downstairs with the book, she heard her father's step. Instinctively she slipped the volume into her pocket before she re-entered the room. Eustace had risen to meet Richard, but he turned towards Dorcas before speaking and saw that she was empty-handed. His spirits soared again.

Chapter V

The Red Roan and the Cup

"MR. WINSTONE, I've come to see you about the horse."

"What horse?" Richard asked, not appearing to see Eustace's proffered hand.

"The red roan."

"The red roan? I've got a red roan, for certain, but what of it?"

"We understood," said Eustace, "at least my father did, that he was for sale. My sister saw the horse somewhere and took a fancy to him."

"Ah!" said Richard. "Now I wonder what made Squire Hamer think that!"

Eustace glanced at Dorcas. She had resumed her seat by the window and was picking nervously at her dress. Her eyes were downcast. He turned to Richard again in some bewilderment.

"I'm very sorry if we've made a mistake," he said. "We quite thought the horse was in the market. I suppose," he added, smiling, "that almost any horse is, if a good offer turns up."

"I don't know about that," said Richard. "At any rate, a man may choose his customer."

"Father!" cried Dorcas, raising her head suddenly and flashing an appealing look from earnest eyes. Richard did not heed her; he did not even seem to notice that she was in the room.

The Yeoman

"Of course," said Eustace. "You'd naturally want him to go to a good master. But a valuable beast always gets good treatment, doesn't he? Besides, you can't suppose, Mr. Winstone——"

"He's not for sale." Richard snapped the words out sharply.

"But can't we discuss it? I don't want to disappoint my sister,—she has set her heart on him. I think Mr. Hamer would give a hundred and twenty guineas, perhaps a little more. Send him up and let's put him through his paces."

"He's not for sale," Richard repeated.

"Is that quite final?"

"Quite. I want the red roan for my own girl."

"Father!" Dorcas cried again. The tone was the same as before and had no pleasure in it.

"In that case, of course," said Eustace, "I can say no more."

"No."

"And I must apologise for having made so unfortunate an offer." Richard nodded, said a perfunctory "Good evening," turned on his heel, and went out. When Eustace looked at Dorcas her face was hidden in her hands.

"What's the matter?" he asked, touching her shoulder. "I don't understand all this."

"Oh, it's all clear enough,—too clear! What can I do?"

"Explain, Dorcas."

"Can't you see?"

The Yeoman

" Honestly,—no." She lifted swimming eyes to him and a shivering under lip drawn in to break a sob.

" He thinks you and Cousin David are against him. He wanted to sell the horse, I know he did,—he spoke of it only yesterday. But he won't sell —to you. You heard him say that a man might choose his customer."

" Yes," said Eustace. " But if he really wants the horse for you, well, I say good luck to the red roan! He may have changed his mind."

She shook her head, and then, rising quickly, with her hands at her throat and her breast straining, cried:

" I shall choke here! I must go out! Forgive me for running away."

" You mustn't go alone," Eustace said, gently. He was beginning to realise something of the burden that caught at her breath. She put on a hat without speaking and went out. He followed, drawing to her side when the gate had clanged behind them.

" I think I understand your trouble a little, Dorcas. We must try to help you."

" It seems less out here," she said. " Sometimes alone, in there, it chokes me!"

" It's hard for you to be alone."

" I could be happy enough alone, if only——"

" If only?"

" Father would be himself,—get this mad idea out of his head."

The Yeoman

"It *is* mad. I'm sure there's not a grain of truth in it."

"But he believes it so! I can see him turning it over and over in his mind. If I could get him to talk about it I might do some good, but when I try he's angry because I can't agree with him. If I did, things would get worse and worse."

"Of course they would," said Eustace. He groped for some helpful suggestion to make, but could find none. He was annoyed with himself, because far beyond his pity, which was true and deep enough, rose the acute consciousness that she was at his side, now and then touching him; almost, in a sharp gust of wind, pressed into his arms. He was alert to catch everything about her,—the sweep and rustle of her skirt, the sway of her body as she walked, the shaded outline of her face,—droop of eyelids, curve of cheek and nostril, the red mouth slightly open for quick breath,—the strong young chin rounding from below the under lip to flow in pure lines to its junction with the throat, the firm set of the head upon sinuous shoulders. She moved with a freedom which showed a creature of abounding health,—muscles with the spring of steel, joints of a perfect flexure. He considered, with a kind of pride which assumed possession, that even his sister was not more finely framed.

They made their way, without speaking of it, to the Cup. On the land side of the downs, as has been said, twilight fell earlier than on the other, so that up there, from comparative greyness, they

The Yeoman

came upon a glowing end of evening and piled clouds from whose upper edges light rayed in bold decline. The sea stirred languidly; to right and left the gorse at the Cup's rim took a deeper gold from the sunset; the scent of it hung hoveringly in the warm air.

They threw themselves down on the short grass and, with propped chins, gazed seaward. Dorcas felt the serene beauty of the scene like a visible and personal comforter; it had been the background of her dreams both in that aspect and when the foam spun high under trailing rainclouds to the wind's clamour. It was then that she escaped from the repression of her father's house, and the insurgent blood sang in her of open life, and the mystery which glimmered only to recede. Now she knew more; the actual battle was in progress, but the mystery remained. As she lay there the looming troubles grew small, they became midges, mere trifles born of earth. In the reaction her heart rose on a wave of thankfulness which included all living things, particularly those whose sympathy was hers. Eustace's long silence comforted her more than words; she had always liked him for his silences. She glanced at him and found that his eyes were on her.

"It was good of you to come out with me," she said.

"Good? To do the one thing I wanted to do? If one could always be praised for going one's own way!"

The Yeoman

Dorcas laughed quietly, and drew down her eyelids against the western glow.

"Do you know what I was thinking of?" Eustace asked.

"No."

"Guess."

"How can I?"

"I was thinking how glorious you'd look on the red roan."

"I don't want the red roan. Tommy does well enough for me."

"What a strange girl you are, Dorcas!"

"Am I? I thought I was ordinary enough."

"Ordinary! Why, most girls would go mad with joy to have such a horse. Even my sister—" He paused.

"But if I don't want the horse?"

"Don't want it! That's just it!"

"Please don't talk about it," she said. All her mind was set towards escape from that matter. The mention of it made her feel her bonds again; it seemed as though she were continually to be drawn back on the first flight.

"Of course I won't if you tell me not to," he said. "But—well, never mind. . . . I had a sail in the *Eileen* this morning."

"Alone?"

"No, with Father Cathcart."

"I sometimes see you out there alone and it makes me afraid."

"Why should you be afraid?" he laughed. "It's

The Yeoman

safe enough. Of course, in risky weather, I should choose a larger boat and take a couple of hands."

"From right up here it looks so tiny, so footy, as we say. You shouldn't run any risks." She drew a deep breath and added: "So much depends on you."

"I suppose it does. I'm always being told that. It seems a bit hard that one can't just live one's own life, doesn't it?"

"It would be much worse if you were allowed to throw it away."

"Are you still thinking about the boat?"

"Oh, no. You might throw your life away in lots of other ways, I suppose." Eustace did not carry that part of the conversation beyond a doubtful "yes." The idea of her watching him and fearing for him made an appealing picture in his mind. He saw her, with shaded eyes, following the dip and glimmer of his sail; he fancied her with a hand at her heart as the little craft heeled over to cut singing before a freshening breeze.

"Whenever I go out now," he said, "I shall think you are up here watching me. It will make my life seem,—well, richer. I haven't many friends, you know."

"You!" Her tone was full of quiet surprise.

"Really, I haven't; hardly anyone outside my own people. There are your cousins now. I like Steve. But even with them the circle isn't very large. Of course I know lots of people, but most of them don't count. That's why I think, in a

The Yeoman

place like this, we should be more to each other than we are."

"Yes," said Dorcas. "I've often thought that."

"I hate all these class distinctions."

"They can't be helped, can they? People can be kind and friendly to each other without doing away with them." She spoke with such an air of conviction that the budding democrat in him was checked; a discussion on such a point, at that time, was far from his thoughts. It was very far from Dorcas's as well.

"When I was away at school," she said, "I was always thinking of this place. I believe I'm happier up here than anywhere."

"Are you happy now?"

"Happier than I've been for days and days." He drew a little nearer to her and stopped, feeling his face burn. He realised that he was not in the secret of her mood; it was clear that she did not thrill as he did. She seemed rather raised above him, in an atmosphere of calm, almost, as it seemed to him, artificial, a wrought calm, brooding over darkness. To break it, and become himself the centre of the change! He ached to see her in that moment of love confession which he imagined as a supreme yielding, a complete obsession,—an instant of wonder lit to reveal a height and depth full of the magic of all attainable and unattainable things. It was a fancy born of a yearning without experience, a thirst nurtured in dreams.

"Dorcas!"

The Yeoman

He laid a hand upon her wrist. The touch awoke her. She dropped the wrist, his fingers falling with it, and met his eyes. Hers glowed deeply, seeming full of purple sea-reflection, widening, contracting, wondering. They wavered and fell. With a firm movement, not hurriedly, she withdrew her hand.

"I forgot to give you the book," she said. It was to gain time for understanding.

She drew it from her pocket and pushed it towards him across the grass. He bent closely over it as though to touch the covering hand with his lips, but it escaped. He kept the attitude, staring at the cover, striving to bring a headlong pulse under control.

"I'm afraid," said Dorcas, "that it's rather spoilt, I—" The memory of that black day of tears flowed over her and she faltered. Something of its loneliness, too, plucked at her heart forlornly; something, also, of the friendly comfort, the budding hope in darkness, which the book represented, came as well.

"These are tear-marks! . . . Dorcas!" The sight of them broke the last semblance of his self-control. That she should have wept thinking of him!

"My dearest girl!" He caught her to him. For a moment she yielded, for a moment she felt that overpowering sweetness which is the blood's delirium; her own lips answered his. Fears of repression seemed to vanish like old walls before a torrent; there was a sense of bursting, of sunder-

The Yeoman

ing, of lifting up. It was as though a new faculty awoke in her, and with that a knowledge which separated her from the life of yesterday, a knowledge of power akin to a weakness which must fence itself.

She drew herself away and stood up. Eustace sprang to his feet beside her, half inclined to renew his besiegements, but checked by something in her attitude. If his blood had been cool enough he might have read defiance in it.

"I must see you again," he said, "soon,—to-morrow!"

She did not answer; she could not trust her voice. He stooped and picked up the book, handling it tenderly. She could not tell him that the tears had not been for him.

"Soon,—perhaps," she said.

"To-morrow!" he repeated. She shook her head and moved towards the path.

"Let me go back with you."

"No."

They parted without any further farewell. The good-bye that sprang to his lips seemed trivial, and died there. He was left to a fevered contemplation of his position, now drunken with the first-fruits of victory, now doubtful whether it were, indeed, victory at all, again doubtful as to the precise meaning of that brave word. But his main feeling was one of physical rapture, an awakening on his part as well as on hers, though different both in kind and in degree.

The Yeoman

Father Cathcart watched him that evening with a painful curiosity. Eustace told how Richard had refused to sell the horse and suggested as an explanation the reason which Dorcas had given him. He did not mention her name. Mr. Hamer was incredulous, Dolly disappointed, though not inconsolable; she had won her bet fairly, which was at any rate a minor satisfaction.

Steve Winstone, too, had manufactured a new fly for her, a very killing fly. Did Eustace know how it was made?

Father Cathcart missed nothing. He observed Eustace's hurried talk and abrupt silences, his varying colour, little indications of suspended thought, and in his heart felt the first chill of a great dread. For that evening, wandering restlessly in the twilight, he had risen suddenly above the edge of the Cup, and dropped again unseen, murmuring to himself:

“ My God, not that, not that! ”

Chapter VI

Antagonism

WHEN Dorcas got back to the farm she found that Richard had not returned. Supper was laid, the lamp lighted. She took up some needlework and sat down.

Her pulse beat quickly; active thought of what had just happened stirred it, it is true, but only under vivid concentration. Some weeks before the feeling might have been different,—she recognised this vaguely, with a kind of wonder. But since then so much had happened: she had come face to face with death and stood beside an open grave; responsibility had increased; David Winstone and his people had come back, bringing with them just that possibility of wider life which she required; her father, inflexible in stubbornness, shunned and distrusted them, and so far had outwardly drawn her with him. There was much in all these things to change her, at least to give her pause, to suggest reflection. Perhaps more than anything else she yearned for sympathy, which, in her mind, carried freedom with it. She was ready to lavish her affection, almost to worship; she brimmed with the potentialities of love seeking outlet; she felt the vast human need. It was this, coming on her torrent-wise, that had overwhelmed her that evening; the impulse to answer caress with caress was irresistible; it was not so much a yielding, perhaps,

The Yeoman

as a conquest won by a temporary exaltation of part of herself.

And she felt no shame in the recollection of those kisses,—there was no cause for shame. She was too robust of mind and body to have the after shrinkings and questionings of women whose purity is certainly not of the spirit, who misconceive essentials and wear masks to themselves as well as to the world. She was not of that kind. She had a capacity for shame which only those of her candid purity can understand. Candour, indeed, is purity's best guardian, and is not fearful of showing the weapons of defence, which, to that other and more common type, would mean a revelation of knowledge which they consider men do not suppose them to possess. True innocence is not afraid of knowledge, but knowledge that plays with subterfuge is no friend to the chief of virtues.

She thought of Eustace with tenderness but not with love. It was this which caused her wonder,—for at that earlier time she felt she might have loved. She was glad it was not so now, but infinitely sorry for him. To her, his motives were above question; she faced the belief that love had prompted him and saw its possibilities. That she, a yeoman's daughter, should marry a Hamer, was incredible; here her training and association spoke. She felt herself his equal, but was content to stand below him; it was a woman's attitude, narrow in outlook, but profoundly honest. She had no ambition, but she had that pride which refuses to be

The Yeoman

lifted up; it is a pride sometimes miscalled humbleness. If love had been in question on her side,—well, there we touch ground where conjecture has no right to wander. She was assured, still with that undersense of wonder, that she did not love him. And, curiously enough, there had been no word of love between them. When they met again,—not soon, but sometime,—perhaps Eustace would have discovered his mistake. She hoped so. She was full of the tenderest charity; he had robbed her of nothing,—indeed, he had opened to her the first glimpse of a new earth.

Upon this mood her father entered. He shadowed, but could not dispel it; she felt that she was gaining strength.

During supper he hardly spoke, although, from time to time, he looked at her in the manner which had become habitual with him,—a manner suggesting that she understood his thoughts, and answered them without need of words. When the table was clear he took out some account books and worked at them for half-an-hour; he often spent whole evenings over them now, going through the figures of previous years. Dorcas stitched quietly.

He closed the books, pushed them away, and leant forward, with brown hands clasped before him.

“Have you seen the new dairy that David’s putting up?”

“Ford took me over it a few days ago.”

The Yeoman

"How kind of him! He might have saved himself the trouble."

"He thought I should be interested in it."

"Interested in what is intended to hurt me?"

"It isn't intended to hurt you, father. He's only doing things in his own way."

"It's a way that means loss to me."

"But if his is a better way than yours why not do the same thing?"

"Do you think I'm going to school to David Winstone?"

"He would be glad to help you if he could," said Dorcas. "I wish you could speak more kindly of him."

"Why should I? I tell you he comes here to prove that I'm a fool, that I'm no farmer. Two can play at that game. I'll sweat my life out to fight him down."

"There's no need to fight," Dorcas insisted. "Why can't you be friends, why must we quarrel with our own blood?"

"Damn our own blood,—it's gone rotten!"

Dorcas stitched on in silence; she was becoming used to these outbreaks, and opposed them so far as she could. But Richard always assumed that she was on his side, that her remonstrances were merely dictated by a woman's natural desire for peace; he could not conceive that he really stood alone. And Dorcas, knowing him so well, had not yet dared to make her position absolutely clear.

The Yeoman

"That was a nice snub I gave young Hamer," Richard said, after a long pause.

"Why did you do it? You wanted to sell the horse."

"Not to them."

"They've always been kind to us."

"But who are they kind to now? It's all David with them, and between the two the place is being turned upside down. The labourers don't want new cottages. That devil Cathcart has been at them."

"I think Father Cathcart means well."

"He means to bleed money out of old Hamer, and that fool David must needs be in the running, just to lift himself up a bit and make believe he's a gentleman. . . . You must ride the red roan, Dorcas,—he's yours. You'll make a better figure on him than that Castle brat. Show 'em what a Winstone girl can do."

"You've no right to talk of Miss Hamer like that," Dorcas flashed out.

"Well, well, call her what you like. . . . Understand that you're to ride the horse,—break his neck over one of Hamer's gates if you like, and I'll send the meat to the old man for his dogs. That'd be good, eh, Dorcas?"

"Would it be good to insult a man who has never done you any wrong? You don't mean what you say, father."

"I mean you to ride the horse,—that's plain, at any rate."

The Yeoman

"I don't want to ride the horse."

"I say you shall ride it, in the face of them all."

"Father, do you want to make me ashamed?"

"Ashamed? God, what shame is there? Can't I do what I like with my own beasts?"

"I should be ashamed," said Dorcas, boldly, "to ride about the country-side on a horse that you gave me just out of pique. Everyone knows you bred it for sale, and everyone will know that you refused Mr. Hamer's offer, and why."

"Will the boy blab, then, or you?"

Dorcas's cheeks crimsoned and she set her lips.

"Which of you? On my soul, I believe the girl's afraid of the horse."

"Afraid? Was I ever afraid of anything? I'll ride him across country to Chesterton and back in four hours, and if the stream's too deep to ford I'll swim it. After that you'll believe that I'm not afraid!"

At another time Richard would probably have discouraged this outcrop of his own spirit in Dorcas, but now he applauded it. He had made up his mind that she should ride the red roan; it had assumed an importance altogether fictitious. He read into it a challenge from himself to the powers which he conceived to be joined against him. He had imported into Eustace's offer the sting of insult, and a bitter anger burned in him against the men who really wished him well.

"Take him to Chesterton, then. If you manage

The Yeoman

it in the time you'll have about tamed his temper, I reckon."

"I'll do it," Dorcas said, and shut her lips tight again. The sudden flame of anger soon died down. She was not in the mood to feed it; she was too full of pity for Richard to feel the force of his injustice to herself. Just at the time when her world was widening his seemed contracting to a narrow unreasoning hate of imagined enemies, enemies who were her friends. Thus far he had been so sure of her that he had put no active obstacle in the way of her seeing them beyond a general disapproval. But at any moment he might take up a firmer attitude, and forbid her to meet them at all. The prospect brought upon her that strangling oppression which always drove her to the open air. She laid down her work.

"I'll go round to the stable and look at him," she said.

"Be careful,—he doesn't like a light."

"If I'm to ride him he must get to know me," she answered.

She went through the kitchen, took a lantern from the beam on which half a dozen hung, lit it and crossed the stable yard. There was really no need for any light, for it was no more than half past eight of an evening in early July; she took it merely because her father would ask her how the creature had behaved.

The horse was in a loose box. She spoke to him caressingly, slipped the bolt of the door, and

The Yeoman

stepped up to his side without a moment's hesitation. The red roan was taken by surprise; his set-back ears were instantly pricked in mute astonishment; he turned the circle of a brilliant eye on the girl's face. She spoke again and smoothed his neck; he whinnied and bent his head, sniffing at the lantern. His old fear had given place to curiosity.

Dorcas recognised that he was in a mood which might not recur again for weeks, and she determined, on an impulse, to make the most of it. She set down the lantern and began to put on saddle and bridle.

"What shall we call you, boy? You must have a pretty name. . . . Steady; so, so. . . . Shall it be—" she paused with pursed mouth and buckled a strap. "What shall it be?" A gleam of light from the lantern on the taut muscles of his shoulder suggested it. "Flame," she said, "that's your name,—Flame."

She led him out and up to the back door, where she called to a maid to bring her a hat. The girl stared at her as she pinned it on.

"Be you gwain out like that, Miss Dorcas?" Dorcas looked down at her plain black frock and laughed.

"I shan't meet anyone," she said. "I'm only going for a turn through the lanes; it's not worth while to change."

Lizzie helped her to the saddle and ran round to open the gate. Richard, hearing the clatter of

The Yeoman

hoofs, looked out of the window to see his daughter already mounted on the horse which she had protested she did not wish to ride. He, too, observed that she had not changed her dress.

"That's temper," he said to himself, smiling grimly, and he waved a hand to her. But she did not see the signal.

Chapter VII

Cousins

FLAME behaved with the utmost discretion, as knowing that he carried a delicate burden, and Dorcas understood that for the time, at any rate, they were on good terms. She rode through un-frequented lanes and by narrow cart-tracks in the fragrant end of evening; wild-roses were dropping their last petals, honeysuckle climbed and crowned the hedgerows, elder-blossom glimmered in broad masses like fallen moons. By the side of the road that ran below the downs she paused, hesitated for an instant, then crossed it and cantered up the long slope of springy turf. At the top she drew rein and gazed across the downward slope to the transcendent jewel of the sea.

Its level was unbroken by a wave; from that altitude and in that mysterious light it might have been a vast inland plain, save that it murmured continually with a voice unknown to pastures. Dorcas drew in the strong salt air with deep breathings; it was freedom to be in that serene and rare atmosphere.

She turned to the right and galloped along the ridge until she reached the sheer descent into Mel-worthy Cove. There she paused again, looking down on to the beach and up the coombe. Lights were coming out in the village, now and then voices reached her, and the sound of a boat crunch-

The Yeoman

ing on the pebbles. The blacksmith's boy's German concertina began to shriek and snarl for the edification of a select audience gathered within the staring ribs of a stranded hulk; they had a lantern with them, which glowed fantastically through the skeleton. It was all so familiar, so charged with association, that the girl felt she must have known it all for longer than her actual years.

From there, forgetting entirely that she was not equipped for going far afield, she turned inland and rode round the head of the coombe, taking, on its further side, a bridle path which joined the main road near the gate of Melworthy Court. At one end of the terrace she saw some lighted Chinese lanterns hanging; under them a table was spread. Her mind leaped back to the simple supper at the farm which she had just left; there was no jealousy in the comparison, only the honest recognition of a difference. She trotted past the gate and almost ran down a young man carrying a fishing rod. He peered up at her as he sprang aside.

“Why, cousin Dorcas!”

“Is that you, Steve?”

“Do you often go round riding people down at night?”

“Not often,” she answered. “If you're going to talk to me you'd better hold Flame's head.” The creature was dancing about as lightly as a child a-tilttoe for a new toy.

“Is his name Flame?”

The Yeoman

“Yes,—I christened him to-night.”

“I’ll lead him up to the house,” said Steve.

“No, no!”

“Of course I shall. Why, what did you come round this way for except to see us?”

“I wasn’t thinking. Won’t you be late?”

“I expect I’m late for everything already.”

“Where have you been?”

“Fishing.”

“Yes, I see that, but where?”

“Well, with Miss Hamer,—in their stream.”

She felt the blood beat into her face. It seemed incredible that only a few hours before she and Eustace had been together. Instinctively, stabbingly, she realised the difference between the two meetings. Nothing could have brought it home to her with so instant a comprehension. Steve’s next words made it clearer still.

“I wish I had a sister, Dorcas.”

“Yes?”

“I suppose a fellow who hasn’t one always wishes that.”

“Not half so much as a girl wishes for a brother,” she cried, feeling herself infinitely alone.

“Can’t we somehow help each other a bit, Dorcas, you and I?”

“Yes,” she said, and stooped forward to lay a hand upon his shoulder. Her heart yearned to the honest boy. Yet how far they seemed apart, they of the same blood! He turned to her with a glad smile.

The Yeoman

"Some day I'll tell you all about it," he said, vaguely; though Dorcas perfectly understood.

"Can't you speak to your mother?" she asked. The question was not prompted by memory of her own mother, but by a budding appreciation of his.

"Well, no," he said, "hardly yet,—some day, of course, not now. . . . You know, Dorcas, I feel an awful fool."

"Nonsense, Steve."

"Yes, I do. Somehow." . . . He paused abruptly and shifted the fishing-basket on his back.

"Somehow?" she repeated.

"Somehow I'm in a new world over here. It's all so swagger. I know we come of a good stock, Dorcas, but—"

She bent down and brought her face close to his.

"Don't worry about anything, Steve, but just the—one thing. If—"

"Yes?"

"If,—"

"You know Dolly?"

"Not much; you see, Steve, father and I,—our Winstones, haven't made much—"

"Money?"

"Well, we've always been here, yeomen folk, and, you see—"

Steve drew himself up and turned to her with a happy pride that thrilled her.

"That's what we all are in spirit,—just Winstones, and not ashamed of it. Why should we

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have come back to the old place if we were ashamed of the name?"

"But you,—" Dorcas insisted.

"We had some luck over there, you stuck here always."

"And have had no luck," said Dorcas. "That makes all the difference."

As they talked they had gradually been approaching the house. A turn in the way brought them into the sphere of the lighted lanterns. Dorcas sprang down in a whirl of confusion.

"Steve, why didn't you tell me——"

"What?"

"Didn't you notice how I was dressed?" He glanced at her casually.

"What's wrong with your dress? Oh, you mean you haven't a habit on. That doesn't matter. Come along."

Dorcas followed him reluctantly. As they neared a flight of low steps that led to the terrace David appeared at the top.

"Hello, Steve, boy! Been horse-lifting?"

"I've brought Dorcas to see you."

"Dorcas!" David ran down the steps to welcome her; his frank kindness always touched her,—sometimes, as it did now,—brought a lump into her throat.

"Take the horse round, Steve." Dorcas protested that she could not stay. "You must, now you're here. We're not going to let the little dove fly away so soon."

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He had a hand on her shoulder, guiding her up the steps.

"Welcome, little dove!" Mrs. Winstone's motherly arms about the girl effectually broke down all feeling of resistance. She was able to escape from the isolation like a caged creature into the sun.

"You're too late for dinner," said Margaret.

"I had supper long ago."

"On perfect evenings like this we dine out here," David explained. "We don't care for ceilings over our heads when we can have the sky."

He put Dorcas into a chair and offered her wine and fruit. The suffused glow from the lanterns played curious tricks with colours,—lowering some, heightening others, so that the fruit and blossom on the table appeared of strange and unknown varieties.

"This is like the Arabian Nights," said Dorcas.

"We do our best to make it like Australian Nights," said Margaret. "Wherever we are, you see, we pine after something else."

"I don't," said Steve, who had rejoined them.
"Melworthy's good enough for me."

"And for me," said Dorcas.

"Happy children! Did you catch any trout, Steve?"

"Heaps. I left them indoors. Dolly Hamer throws a fly splendidly."

"Then you could teach her nothing?" David asked.

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"Not in the way of catching, but I taught her how to make a new fly." He did not mention that in order to get the hackle the right shade he had had to requisition a couple of hairs from his pupil's radiant head. "By the way, Dorcas, she was fishing with the old man for a bet."

"Yes?" Her heart began the quick, sickening beat she was learning to know too well.

"Did Eustace see cousin Richard this afternoon about a horse?"

"Yes."

"Well, Dolly won it."

"But father isn't going to sell him. I'm to ride him. I came here on him to-night." She gave her information in a tone so strained to commonplace that Margaret detected the note.

"That's a pity," said Steve. "At least, I mean Dolly will be disappointed. Still, I'm glad for your sake, Dorcas. Flame's a lovely fellow."

"Why Flame?" asked David.

Dorcas explained how she had come to give him the name.

"It's a queer name for a horse," David said. "Is he the red roan that Richard bred?"

"Yes."

At this moment, to Dorcas's great relief, Ford appeared. He took the seat beside her which Steve had just left to attack his belated dinner. A budding affection had not sapped his appetite.

"How did you get here, Dorcas?" Ford asked.

"I rode," she said, feeling that somehow she

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would have to answer questions about the horse all her life. "Please don't look at my dress, I didn't intend to come here. I only meant just to exercise in the lanes near home."

"Don't you feel near home here?"

"More than near, I hope," Margaret said. "You must manage to come oftener, Dorcas. Why, if Steve hadn't caught you to-night we might not have seen you for days."

Dorcas was silent. Her eyes, under their lowered lids, had a message in them that she longed to free; but she dared not deliver it, lest a rush of feeling should carry her too far. To check the impulse there rose before her the figure of the lonely man at home, fighting his imaginary enemies in increasing gloom.

She remained for half an hour, vainly striving to lead her mind into a quiet channel after a day in which she had touched the extremes of feeling. But the current ran too turbulently to be soothed by any conscious effort; it was beyond her power to enforce the visitings of peace. The difficulties of her position more and more became evident; it was a position where to choose either way would be to carry the burden of a wrong. It is easy to make choice between good and evil, but life does not often present its problems in such simple terms. Compromise is its essence, and to the young compromise has an air of hypocrisy hard to reconcile with ideals still potent and unsoiled.

Ford insisted on riding back with her, and they

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took the shortest road to the farm, passing the new dairy on the way. Ford nodded at it familiarly.

"My pet scheme 's growing," he said. "In a week that place should be finished."

They paused before it,—a long one-storied building whose yet unglazed windows gaped black.

"You'll get yourself hated for it," Dorcas said.

"One can't help that kind of thing. In time the people will see that it's really all for their good."

"Perhaps."

"You wouldn't give up a plan on account of a little foolish opposition,—not expressed opposition, either,—would you?"

"Not if I really set any store by it."

She was staring hard at the corner of the building; something, she thought, had moved in the shadow; a figure that seemed familiar. Ford noticed it at the same moment and rode forward. When he came back he said:

"I thought the foreman might have forgotten to padlock the door."

"Is it all right?"

"Yes."

They turned and rode on.

"Cousin Dorcas, I've often wanted to have a quiet word with you,—just so that you might understand me better."

"I do understand you, Ford."

"I mean about all these improvements and

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things, for I suppose I'm at the bottom of them,—I, and that fine fellow Cathcart."

"Yes."

"You don't think I'm doing wrong?"

"I think you're doing right."

"In spite of Cousin Richard's opposition?"

"Yes."

"You're a brave girl, Dorcas."

"You don't know how weak I am," she cried out quickly. "What can I do?"

"Have you much to bear?"

"Sometimes it seems only a little, sometimes too much."

"Poor child." The voice was strong and kind, the word child, at the moment, something of a revelation, lighting the difference between the man who can act at will and cut his own way, and the woman who must wait. But with that sense of impotency in one direction came the conviction of her power in another, the unconscious power which had drawn Eustace to her that afternoon. Was that one supreme strength also to become a weakness, sapping its own foundations? The thirst for sympathy, for the low word, for closing hands,—all surged up in her till she saw the gloom break into a dawn that at least had vivid colour and a rush of life.

"Steady, Dorcas!" She was recalled by a jerk that threw her forward on the horse's neck. Then she became aware of Ford's hand closed firmly over hers.

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"Were you dreaming, Dorcas?"

"Yes."

The pressure on her fingers continued the thread of the dream. And still it held her, though by some subtle change it had taken a different meaning; it was as though a new heart beat in her, and though the message was still of life it was life not insurgent, but tempered to noble ends. The shadow lifted from her spirit, and it was in a voice perfectly controlled that, when the farm bulked before them against the stars, she said:

"Please leave me here, Ford."

"If you wish it."

"It will be better."

He released her hand, swung his horse round, and rode away. She listened until the hoof beats were lost over a ridge, then walked Flame forward to the gate. It was open. As she passed through, a figure plodded up the pathway that skirted the garden fence to the right. She gave it a good-night, but no answer was returned.

When she went in Richard was reading the great Bible in which so many Winstone names were inscribed; recently, contrary to his custom, he opened it almost every night. He more often gazed at the long list of names than turned the pages.

"What like of a night is it?" he asked.

"Beautiful."

"Have you put the horse up?"

"Yes, father."

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He bent again over the book and ran his fingers down the entries.

" 'Tis your birthday to-morrow, Dorcas. The horse'll make a present for you, eh?"

She could struggle no more that day. She could only stoop and kiss his lined forehead dutifully.

Chapter VIII

A Meeting by the Way

EUSTACE conceived that the world was in his hand. When he awoke the next morning it was to the memory of a rapture new in his experience, of a primitive freshness incalculably sweet. To meet Dorcas so, day after day, and always in the hallowed circle of the Cup, suggested the utmost of felicity. It was to be always summer, of course. His fancy could not reach beyond that blue July.

He had soon to discover that, after all, the world, even as he imagined it, was not so ready to become his. He made pilgrimages to the Cup, but his divinity did not appear, and there was no oracle in wind or cliff-side or the friendly sea to answer his mute appeals for the reason of her absence. It may be taken as indicative of his mood at this period that he made careful surveys of the ground within the Cup, on the chance that Dorcas might have hidden a note under a stone, or impaled one on a thorn. When he discovered nothing he felt annoyed that she had not chosen so pretty a method of communication.

From the Cup he gradually drew nearer to the farm, narrowing, day by day, the circle in which she hid herself. From the slope of the downs he overlooked the back of the house and the barns and outbuildings. Sometimes he saw her walk across the garden in a sunbonnet which effectually hid her

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face; she appeared never to think of looking up towards such positions as he selected for occupation. The obvious thing,—a call upon her,—he restrained from, partly because it was wholly unromantic, though mainly on account of Richard's hostile attitude—an attitude, indeed, which shadowed the future ominously when he happened to look ahead. But it must be confessed that he did not look ahead often, or with any steady purpose; there were looming difficulties in that quarter which it was easier not to realise too vividly.

A week passed and he had not had speech with her; it was doubtful whether she was even aware of his frequent nearness. The opportunity of a church service,—that lover's constant hope,—was denied to him. The appearance of a Hamer in the Parish Church would have put conjecture on a dozen scents. But at last chance threw him a starveling crumb. They met on the open road, with white dust under their feet. The place was so public, so frankly ordinary, that Eustace found himself holding out his hand and greeting Dorcas with the mere commonplaces of acquaintanceship. After these had passed he managed to say:

“I haven't seen you for a week,—at least, we haven't met for a week.”

“Is it so long?”

The quiet question amazed him.

“Yes,—don't you remember——”

“The afternoon you came about the horse?”

“Yes,—and after.”

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Her eyes met his, fell, and were raised again steadily; only her cheek burned with recollection.

"I've seen you day after day, watched for you, but you never gave a look my way, Dorcas."

"But if I didn't know you were there?"

"You must have guessed."

"How could I guess?" The interrogative method of reply may be rendered infinitely damping. Poor Eustace no longer felt in the least like a king who has only to open his hand for the jewel to fall into it.

"I thought you would remember," he said, feeling somehow that he had no right to remind her.

"Wouldn't it be better to forget?"

"No!" he cried. Her tone rebuked his hot blood; therefore he resented it.

"Please just think that I was tired and unhappy. I wanted sympathy as I hope you'll never want it, Mr. Hamer. You were kind to me."

"And you to me!"

She could not deny that; she did not wish to deny it. She only desired that it should not be misunderstood. But, hardly understanding it herself, explanation was impossible, and nothing will convince a young man with a first passion tingling in his veins, a passion, too, which has snatched the encouragement of an embrace.

"Are we never to meet again as we did before?" he cried.

She could not tell him how impossible that was, nor did he need any such assurance. He merely

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asked the inevitable question which was, no doubt, put to Eve so very long ago.

"It would be better not to meet," she said, after a pause,—and added on a wave of pity and remembered kindness,—"too much."

He caught at that.

"But sometimes?"

"Perhaps."

"Dorcas, why are you cruel?"

"I'm thinking of you."

"But the cruelty is in keeping me away from you."

"You think far too much of it all."

Was it possible, he thought, that she should consider that wonderful half-hour, to him so glamourous, as merely a trifling episode not worth remembering? Yet, if so, why hesitate to repeat it? He asked no more.

"I can't think too much of it," he said. She tried to laugh his seriousness away.

"In six months you'll have forgotten all about it. Why, you've all kinds of important things to think about,—your books, and—"

"Books!" he repeated, scornfully.

She held out her hand for good-bye. There was no one in sight on the shimmering road, no prying eye but the brazen sun's. He took a step towards her with face ablaze. She moved aside and onwards, calling good-bye as she passed him. He turned to follow, crying "Dorcas!" She increased her pace, even ran for a few

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yards, until he dropped behind. She did not look after him.

That was his solitary crumb of comfort,—to have spoken with her for a few miserable minutes. But it was a bitter crumb and hard to swallow. He blamed himself for clumsiness, he must have frightened her. But Dorcas was not a girl to be frightened; even in his extreme discomfort and self-pity he saw that she had dominated the interview, such as it was, and not he. He was loath to believe her account of the earlier episode; he refused to believe it. And in looking round for some other explanation his surmise fell upon her cousins, Ford and Steve. Why, there was a solution to his hand. The king felt himself dethroned and sceptreless. There was nothing for it but to attempt reconquest of the kingdom,—and to what end? He saw his father and Cathcart, armed with full authority, leagued against him in the deadliest of all warfare. Even so little consideration as that thrust upon him some sense of the consequences of passion in a world which he was convinced had no true knowledge of it. Poor boy, the world and he were like to be at odds on that point for many moons. If only passion were a plaything,—that was the inner meaning of his condition, and, of course, he did not know it.

Then, there was another difficulty; he was not only, apparently, to be denied opportunity of seeing Dorcas, but also he could not, hardly ever seeing them together, judge of her relations with her

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cousins. True, Mrs. Winstone had pointedly asked him to meet her at her house,—that was something, but how little to satisfy the wide sweep of his aspirations. There was the incorrigible Richard Winstone to deal with; Eustace felt that he hated Richard, more because he was Dorcas's father than because he presumed to oppose the house of Hamer. The latter he might have forgiven him, for Eustace was at least magnanimous.

He walked home with a wholesome conviction of the futility of things, and went down to look at the *Eileen*. She lay motionless in the arms of the little bay. The outer ripples called to him with enticing voices, and soon he was rounding the point and creeping along the coast to Melworthy Cove. He did not ask Father Cathcart to go with him; he did not want the society of anyone, save Dorcas. He was in the mood to which the loneliness of nature makes its appeal only for the purposes of a contrast and a question; the one,—this glory of summer seems like feasting in the house of mourning; the other,—why can't I have what I want? The discipline of life is always ready to supply the answer, but at its own price.

Chapter IX

Benjy

DORCAS, walking back from Melworthy some days later, was overtaken by Job Flower in a high dog-cart. He had been in to Chesterton on business,—he often went now in place of Richard, who preferred brooding about his fields. Dorcas called to him to stop, and climbed to the vacant place beside him.

“Is there much doing in Chesterton, Job?”

“Little ‘nough, Miss.”

“How’s little Benjy?”

“Zeäme’s ever; he do just sit ‘bout like an’ nod an’ nod.”

“Poor wee chap. I’ll come in to see him this afternoon.”

“Thank’ee, miss.” Her heart smote her that she had not been to look after the poor maimed creature for so long. So much had happened to draw her attention from the old matters which had once stood first in her thoughts.

“Did you see father this morning, Job?”

“Ees, miss.” He shot a sidelong glance at her from beneath brows contracted to a curious expression of cunning.

“I wish you could rouse him a bit, Job. He thinks the world of you.”

“An’ I thinks the zeäme o’ he.”

“I know you do, that’s why I speak.”

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The old man flicked the horse with his whip.

"Meäster's well 'nough," he said.

"He isn't like his old self, Job. You must see that."

"'Tis all this schemin' to ruin un that's on 'is mind. I do call 't a crool sheäme."

"But, Job—"

"There isn't no but in it,—'tis a devil's geäme."

"You surely don't think that Mr. David and Mr. Ford would wish to do him any hurt?"

"I think wi' Meäster. They'll ruin un, an' they do meän it."

"Why?"

The why of any question did not come within Job Flower's province. It was his business to follow his master's lead, to suspect evil in change, to believe only in his master and the land. He did not, therefore, reply to the crucial word.

"I hoped you'd try to help me, Job."

"Help'ee? Ees,—but not 'gainst he."

"But I'm not against him, Job. I only want him to understand that the others really wish to help him, not to do him harm."

Job looked at her again with that curious expression which sat so ill upon a face moulded in simple lines. It was as though the earlier wrinkles were distorted to express the usurping ugliness. The man's virtue consisted in an absolute loyalty to one idea.

"Job."

"Ees, miss."

The Yeoman

"Have you ever spoken to Mr. Ford?"

"He's spoke to I."

"Didn't you find him kind and friendly?"

"I took no count o' what 'er said."

"But that wasn't fair," cried Dorcas. "How would you like to be condemned without a hearing?"

"He mid talk an' talk, 'twould meäke no difference. I do look to what 'er does."

"He only farms in his own way."

"Maybe."

Dorcas sighed and said no more; it was evident that Job Flower was not to be moved by any arguments which she could set before him. Things grew more hopeless every day. Even to an experienced eye it was obvious that the once trim farm of Richard Winstone was being neglected. Job did what he could, but having been a servant all his life, and coming of a stock with servitude in the blood, he was without any of the initiative which makes men masters. Perhaps he understood Richard better than Dorcas. At any rate he was wholly on his side, an irreconcilable. And those two made up the party which was to oppose the inevitable, for Richard and Job had found in the men whom they sought to number amongst the disaffected an eye to comfort and the main chance, which was ready to take the risks of the curse of change. A proverb was all very well, but for a proverb a man was not going to refuse to move from a bad cottage into a good one. Besides, if

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you said as you passed over the new threshold, "Out, devil, here comes an honest man," away the devil went. It was strange that this method of disposing of the devil had been forgotten; no one quite knew who revived it; perhaps it evolved itself from mere necessity. There were those who, later, attributed the charm to Father Cathcart. If he were, indeed, responsible, it was an expedient perfectly justifiable.

In the afternoon, when her work was over, Dorcas went to see Benjy Flower. Job's cottage was reasonably large, and sound as to roof and walls; it was beautiful, too, having trellises covered with roses and clematis, which topped the low eaves and drooped on to the thatch. The wall which surrounded it was alight with stone-crop and golden mosses, the garden trim and prolific of homely vegetables and old-fashioned, heavy perfumed flowers. But on the threshold the sense of order stopped. Mrs. Flower was a woman who muddled things, so that by what appeared a conscientious disregard of system she succeeded in doubling her work and inducing chaos. In her youth she had been a pretty woman, and had had many love affairs; they ended in a marriage with her cousin Job, he being at that time close on fifty, and she no more than half that age. It was a union which both regretted, the more particularly as their only child was a poor idiot creature whose sole pleasure was to sit in the sun; when no sun shone he moped indoors.

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It will be understood, therefore, why Job's opinion of women did not rise beyond the idea that they were chattels, necessary house-gear,—they might turn out well or ill, like an earthenware crock. In his own mind he blamed his wife for Benjy, though Melworthy was pitifully full of such tragic results of inter-marriage. It was said at one time that of the labouring and fishing population every soul was related by blood to his next neighbour; an exaggeration, doubtless, but suggestive of an evil now happily dying out. The Winstones had never inter-married, being in a position to choose their wives elsewhere; but the unthinking poor, tied to their narrow parish, remote from everywhere, took what they could get, and when a little one, maimed in mind or body, was born, called it a "God's child," and cherished it. They had no thought of irony in the designation; that reading was left to the civilisation that passed them by.

Benjy was sitting before the door in a chair made like a baby's, with a shelf that served for a table as well as to keep him in. On the shelf he had some old lead soldiers, with the colour long since worn away, a few wooden dominoes, and half a dozen painted animals from a Noah's Ark. These, with clumsy, aimless fingers, he arranged and rearranged with patient industry. If one happened to fall he hissed and gurgled until it was returned to him; no intelligible word had ever been formed by those stricken lips.

The boy knew Dorcas and signified his recogni-

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tion by a slow flapping motion of the hands, and a kind of purring whine. She sat before him and began to marshal his toys, talking the while as though he understood.

"Why, Benjy, how well you look to-day. . . Shall we put the soldiers here, and the one on horseback in front, to show he's captain? And then the camel and the elephant behind, with the monkey to tell them the way? What's this queer thing? I'm sure I don't know,—it looks like a grasshopper."

"Vor sure 'tis," said Mrs. Flower from the doorway, where she stood with folded arms, watching the play. "Doän't 'ee think 'er gets more cute like, miss?"

"Yes, yes, I hope so," said Dorcas, stooping to pick up a fallen domino.

"Job wun't have it thet 'er is, but somehow 't do zeem to I that 'er takes mwore note o' things, poor dear. . . . What do 'ee think o' the new cwoat, miss?"

"It's very pretty, Bess."

"Do 'ee think it suits un?"

"Yes. Did you make it?"

"I'd not 'low any woone else to do a stitch vor un."

The new coat was an affair of green velveteen, decorated round the collar and down the front with cheap lace, for so Mrs. Flower loved to prank out the poor stunted boy; striving, perhaps, to make him seem still a baby in chance eyes that

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did not know the tragedy of his twelve darkened years.

"Is Job in yet?" Dorcas asked, to get away from the subject of the coat.

"No. Theäse days 'er do get tarr'ble leäte o' nights. Where 'er gets to I can't think. There 's some 'd be jealous o' un."

"There 's no call for you to be jealous, Bess."

The poor woman smiled proudly and drew up the figure which had once been so lissom and desired by Melworthy. She was still not without a certain beauty, still straight, still full-blooded and robust. The tears that sprang to Dorcas's eyes came of a contrast too obvious to be missed.

"Poor Benjy," she said in her heart, but her lips were silent.

"Zome nights 'er doän't come whoäm till nigh 'leven 'clock, an' then 'er never says so much as 'Evenen Bess!'"

"I'm afraid," said Dorcas, "he 's worked rather hard now."

"Wull, wull, 'tis just so well. He an' meäster 's good vriends, ay, better'n ever bevore. Meäster do sometimes come in yere an' zit o' evenens."

"I know he does," said Dorcas. "What do they talk about?"

"When I be 'bout they do just zit and smoäke like, so quiet 's a pair o' dead ducks. But when I've a gone up wi' Benjy they do speäk sometimes. There, 'tis all varm talk, I s'pose."

"No doubt," said Dorcas.

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When dusk came on and the air grew chilly, she walked about the little garden with Benjy, holding his hand, and now and then repeating to him the few words he understood, but could not pronounce. When she said "flower," he pointed to the nearest blossom, for "Heaven" he gazed into the sky; but soon his narrow list was exhausted, and Dorcas led him up and down in silence, returning to her own thoughts; thoughts unconsciously influenced by the touch of the hot, limp hand she held.

She was living in the shadow of a fear formless, perhaps remote, yet wholly real. There was no escape from its sinister environment; all she loved was included in that circle of mysterious darkness. There were times when she could free herself and live merely in the present, rejoicing in the life of wind and sea, herself a part of the world's music, sprung from earth and the simple things which are humanity's best teachers. She felt thus when she was alone, in moods of strange uplifting; or when she was with Margaret Winstone, or Ford, or even Steve, whose days, it seemed, passed delightfully and without a hint of sorrow. But always some chance word, or incident, snatched her back to those darker realities which lay so close about her, and she experienced that numbing sense of impotence in the face of suspected danger which is so hard to bear, so impossible to avoid. She had, perforce, to live in two worlds, and be a becoming citizen of both; duty clashed with knowledge and instinct; between her and freedom stood that

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pathetic figure of the stubborn, lonely man who, at a crisis in his fortunes, had, by the very nature of his limitations, misunderstood his own blood; and by the iron force of those limitations was held in a bondage which grew stricter every day. Richard was his own prison house, and he had thrown away the key.

When Job came heavily through the gate and up the pathway, Dorcas was just ready to go. To his wife's question, "Where have 'ee bin, then?" he made no answer; he seldom answered her questions of any kind.

Chapter X

Father Cathcart Speaks

FATHER CATHCART was sitting on one of the rocks which, like an eye-brow, fringed the little bay below the castle. Every now and then he stooped, picked up a flat stone and flung it beyond the creaming ripples to where the deeper water had the colour of amethyst piled on amethyst. This, for him, was an idle occupation, and indicated that his mind was wandering from its usual intentness upon some particular theme. And, indeed, his mind had lately wandered a good deal from the abstract matters which, of necessity, made large demands upon his thought. He, too, was being drawn into the stream of tendency which seemed likely to fling itself into a torrent of events; but for him the view was more impersonal than for most of those concerned. His passions were not involved, and therefore, he concluded, he had clearer sight.

His chief concern was with Eustace. In that young life was wrapped up the honour, the continuation, the just ascendancy, of an unblemished name. These things would have touched him closely apart from his affection for the impulsive boy; but he loved him with a rare tenderness, a tenderness almost womanly, and sensitive to the least thorn-prick of the world's brambles. Since the evening when he had unexpectedly seen Dorcas and Eustace together he had kept a close watch

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upon his charge, not shadowing him or setting spies upon him,—he was too punctiliously proud for that,—but searching for indications of his state of mind. It had been his hope that Eustace would recover from his spring fever, but now autumn had come, and still the fire appeared to be well alight. So far as he knew there had been no secret meetings between the two, which, while it reassured him in one direction, was cause for greater uneasiness in another. It seemed to imply that Eustace's fancy had some root, was something more than a mere blossom of the blood, to die of its own heat and end in a sentimental memory. At first he was inclined to think hardly of the girl, but his clear sense of justice was, after a time, bound to acquit her,—nay, more, to raise her up as fit to stand beside women of the greater world. When he met her, as he did from time to time, he could read nothing in her eyes but candour and a frank simplicity, which were above a sordid amour or the subterfuges of an ambitious trickster.

Presently the sound of a quick footstep caused Cathcart to turn his head. It was Eustace, coming down the little coombe with a coil of rope over his shoulder. He made a seat of it by the priest's side, and the two remained silent for a time, listening to the musical swish of the near water and the endless deeper murmur round the coast. Colour and music were joint rulers of the natural world.

At last Cathcart said: "What do you think of going away for a few months?"

The Yeoman

"Going away?" Eustace echoed. "Why should I go away?"

"Because I think it would do you good to travel. Youth is the time for getting new impressions; why, you might grow up thinking that Melworthy was the world."

"It's a very good part of the world," said Eustace, "and will do well enough for me." He looked at Cathcart enquiringly. This idea of travel had been sprung upon him so suddenly that he suspected some special motive in it.

"I admit," said Cathcart, smiling, "that it 's a good part of the world, and it will seem all the better when you come back to it. There 's nothing like change for rivetting affection to the old place."

Eustace wondered whether his tutor would also consider that change rivetted affection to individuals. He felt, himself, that it would, but as his affection for Dorcas was strong enough already he was not prepared to undergo heroic measures for increasing it.

"Does father wish me to go?" he asked.

"I suggested to him that it might be wise."

"Why wise?"

Cathcart laid his arm across Eustace's shoulder, and leant upon it.

"Because you don't seem yourself, my boy. You're restless and I think not quite happy. This isn't my fancy, is it?"

"No," said Eustace, "it isn't altogether your

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fancy, though I daresay you make too much of it."

"Perhaps," said Cathcart softly. "But where you are concerned it is my duty, as well as my chief pleasure, to be watchful. You know I love you, Eustace?"

"I'm sure you do,—quite sure." After a pause he added: "And I would take it as a token of your love if you wouldn't press this matter of my going away just now."

"You won't be angry with me if I say that I think that very request makes it right for me to press it?"

"Why?" Eustace scooped up a double-handful of sand and let it trickle slowly through fingers that trembled a little.

"Consider me your physician," said Cathcart, "not of the body, but of the mind. I see certain indications which make me uneasy, and I prescribe change."

"And if it didn't cure?"

"Then, perhaps, some other remedy would. We must make a start somewhere."

"I would rather begin with the other remedy."

"Can you suggest one?"

"You are the doctor," said Eustace.

"Well, the symptoms are pretty clear; restlessness, lack of concentration, a desire to be alone, feverishness, haunting of a certain place—"

Eustace started, glanced at Cathcart, looked away to the glimmering sky-line, and set his lips.

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"It would appear," he said, "that you've been playing the spy."

"My dear boy, I refrained from that. Don't be angry. After all, Melworthy's not very big, and one can't help noticing things. Let me be quite candid with you; perhaps I should have been so at first. Come away from here for a time, see what change will do, try loyally to forget her."

"Impossible!" cried Eustace. He made no further attempt at pretending not to understand.

"Nothing is impossible."

"For heaven's sake, don't talk that jargon to me," he said.

"I must, I must," said Cathcart, "because I believe it to be true in such cases as yours. By that I don't mean to make light of your feelings in the matter,—indeed, I respect them in so far as they are an indication of natural impulse. But impulse, alone, leads men astray more often than in the straight road. I ask you, Eustace, what the end of it is to be?"

"The end? Why,—" He paused, and felt himself swimming in a gulf, with blackness all about him; for he swam alone, and though he called aloud the voice of Dorcas did not answer him.

"The end," Cathcart repeated. Without waiting for an answer, he went on: "I know nothing of what Miss Winstone thinks, or whether you have spoken a word to her,—I hope not, for both your sakes, for the sake of all of us. . . . Eustace, you could not marry her——"

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“Why?”

“Because it would be too cruel a blow to your father, too hard for him to bear, I think. You are the hope of his life, the inheritor of his name. Such a marriage would cut him down. Consider the traditions of your house, its power——”

“Its pride,” Eustace interjected bitterly.

“Yes, its pride, and, I believe, a worthy pride. I say nothing to your difference of faith, I won’t press that, although you may think the less of me for refraining. You are saying in your heart, now, I dare say, ‘Her faith shall be my faith, what is good enough for her is good enough for me.’ I won’t quarrel with the mood, in certain cases I might sympathise with it, and leave God to be my judge.”

He paused, holding his head between his hands, and watching through half-closed eyes the steady incoming of the tide, wave curling after wave always a little higher up the thirsty sand. Eustace was watching, too, but his eyes were wide and burning.

“Go on,” he said, “let me hear it all.”

“Eustace, I’m bitterly sorry to be hurting you like this. You believe that, old fellow?”

“I believe,” he answered, choking, “that you always do what you think’s your duty.”

“Thank you for that. . . . I must wound you a little more. Richard Winstone is your father’s avowed enemy; he speaks ill of him,

The Yeoman

tries to injure a man who never had any but kindly thoughts about him, strikes at him in the dark."

"Dorcas is different," cried Eustace, "she knows he's wrong; but what can she do?"

"I'm prepared to admit that Dorcas is different, I know nothing but good of her. But what then? This is not a case in which a rival feud between families can be ended by a marriage, for the ill-will is all on one side. Your father has done everything in his power to help Winstone against himself, his cousin David has done the same; with what result, you know."

"Yes," said Eustace, "I know."

"Therefore, from every point of view, I beseech you to fight against this passion, if it has come to that. And remember that it's not merely a personal sacrifice I ask you to make, but one involving great issues."

Eustace was silent. He could not even assert that in sacrificing himself he would also make another an innocent victim; he was denied that tempestuous argument, and Cathcart found his heart infinitely lightened when he heard no hint of it. Eustace was striking out blindly in the gulf again.

"Does father know anything of all this?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"Thank you." He pressed Cathcart's hand gratefully.

The Yeoman

"I only suggested to him that a little travel might do you good."

"Alone?"

"Certainly not. It would be poor help to send you away to brood alone."

"With whom, then?"

"With me, if you can endure me after to-day. And, perhaps, Steve Winstone might come, to keep us from boring one another."

"Have you spoken to him about it?"

"I leave that to you, if you think well of the idea. He's to dine with us to-night, I believe."

"Yes," said Eustace.

"Will you suggest it to him, then?"

"Aren't you a little hard on me, Cathcart? I'm—well, all in the dark, somehow. If you gave me time I might see things more clearly."

"I try not to be hard, Eustace. God knows, to save you pain, I would bear double myself. But the world won't let us do that kind of thing. I can only advise you to what seems best."

"It may not be best, after all."

"It may not, but I think it is. Will you speak to Steve?"

"Yes," said Eustace.

"That's well, my boy. Now, I'll leave you. Try to get away from yourself, and never forget that I'm your friend. Shall we walk together this afternoon?"

Eustace nodded and Cathcart rose and moved slowly away, leaving Eustace to consider the full

The Yeoman

meaning of the interview. He did consider it, but hardly in a manner to commend itself to Cathcart's judgment. He felt himself hemmed in, surrounded by forces which had no comprehension,—much, indeed, as Dorcas felt. The two, so far apart, were yet alike in that sense of bondage; it made a link between them more powerful than either could well calculate. Eustace apprehended Dorcas's forlorn condition with an intensity increased by consideration of his own; his pity for her soothed his pity for himself. On the other hand, Cathcart's plain statement of the facts of the case had forced open his unwilling eyes to a view which he had deliberately withheld himself from contemplating. What, indeed, was to be the end? That question rippled from the sculls as he rowed over to the *Eileen*, it dripped from the rope as he hauled in the anchor, and creaked from the blocks as he hoisted sail.

Chapter XI

Trespassers

ON the afternoon of that day Richard Winstone was wandering about his farm in the aimless way which had become habitual with him. His mind was occupied with abortive schemes for accomplishing wonderful things which should exhibit his superiority to his cousin David to all the world. He kept his eyes fixed upon the ground, as though to take into his confidence the land from which he expected so much. But the land gave him no help. There it was, ploughed land and pasture, Winstone land, more familiar to him than any friendly face; he seemed to know every clod of it as well as he knew its larger features,—the sweep of fields, the long straight lines of the furrows, the angles of meeting hedgerows. The plan of the whole place was in his eye, clear as a map. He continually repeated to himself that it was his, that no one should take it from him; then he would glance round with sparkling eyes as though he expected it suddenly to glow with miraculous crops at his mere words, and so shower gold into his lap for the discomfiture of his enemies. But autumn stared upon him from reaped fields; the crops were in; there was not even visible promise of the common miracle of resurrection.

He passed through a rickety gate, and came into

The Yeoman

the cart-track where we first saw him. It was a favourite promenade of his, commanding, as it did, the church, his house, and the West Melworthy road. It also brought burningly to his recollection the evening of David's home-coming, with all its accumulated bitterness. He seemed to have lived years since then, every night and day of which had added something to the burden which was surely bearing him to the ground. Reason no longer had a voice in him; he was possessed with the one idea as with a demon that continually tore him and would not be driven forth. Rather, he nursed it, making a virtue of his suffering and rubbing salt into his wounds.

As he turned a corner he heard voices and looked up. Cathcart and Eustace were approaching; the priest's arm was linked in the boy's. They had been going over again the discussion of the morning, and both were grave. Richard drew himself up and stood full in their path. They greeted him together as they advanced, but he stood immovable.

"I'm sorry for this," Eustace whispered.

"I'm glad," said Cathcart. "I want to speak to him."

"Not about—"

"No, no." They were within two yards of Richard.

"I suppose you know you're trespassing," he said, in a heavy grating voice.

"Trespassing?" said Cathcart. "Well, I sup-

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pose we are, strictly. But we Melworthy folks who know each other never think of that."

"Then it's time you did."

"But you're quite at liberty, Mr. Winstone, as you know, to go anywhere you like on our place," said Eustace.

"I prefer to stay on my own."

"Mayn't we pass, then?" asked Cathcart.

"No, you mayn't."

"Come, come, Mr. Winstone, don't be unneighbourly. We're doing no harm."

"Harm or no harm, back you go." The tone was one of studied insult. Eustace flushed with anger; Cathcart remained perfectly cool, though his lips tightened and his eyes widened.

"You forget yourself, sir," he said.

"Do I? I don't forget you."

"You have no reason to remember anything against me."

"No?" Richard sneered.

"Mr. Winstone," cried Eustace, "stand aside and let us pass." Richard looked him up and down without replying; then his gaze returned to Cathcart.

"You should teach this boy manners,—if you can find time from meddling with other people's affairs."

Eustace took a quick step forward, but Cathcart drew him back.

"I don't understand you," he said, quietly, "unless you mean that I do my duty."

The Yeoman

“Pretty duty, master priest!”

“Do you quarrel with me because I tell poor men that their masters have no right to herd their families into fever-dens and worse?”

“You leave the masters alone, and the men, too!”

“What business have you to speak,” cried Cathcart, suddenly flaring up, “who dismissed a man because he turned out of one of your hovels to go into a place where his children could breathe?”

“I packed him off because he had the face to go into a cottage this boy’s father and your master built,—there!”

“He shan’t suffer for it, so you’re revenge has failed, Mr. Winstone.”

“Has it, by God? Pack, both of you!” Cathcart stood firm; Eustace was straining to advance, all a-quiver with rage.

“Take away your damned smooth face, I tell you, or I’ll—” A burst of uncontrollable fury darkened Richard’s brow; he sprang forward, and slashed Cathcart across the cheek with the lithe willow switch he carried; the blood spurted; he drew back to strike again. But Eustace was upon him; the switch was wrenched from his hand, and in a moment the broken pieces lay at Richard’s feet.

“You coward,” Eustace panted, “you infernal coward!”

Cathcart took him by the shoulder and drew him away. “Come,” he said, “there’s been enough of

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this. Mr. Winstone, I hope you're satisfied. This mark will, perhaps, recompense you for our trespassing."

Richard stared at them dully as they turned away, and from them to the scattered pieces on the path. A dead weight seemed to bear him down, he felt the shame of what he had done in his bones. Yet he was beyond penitence, or even apology; this was all part, it seemed, of the way he had to go, to which he was compelled by that power within himself, yet hardly of himself. This made the shame more bitter, so that if Cathcart and Eustace could have seen him a few minutes later, sitting, with his face buried in his hands, near the spot where he had struck the blow, they would have pitied him from their souls. For through his fingers there trickled a few tears wrung from the very dregs of bitter hopelessness.

"I'll go," Eustace said to Cathcart as they walked home together, "I see I must." And to himself he repeated, "I must, I must," trying, by iteration of the words, to shut out the image of Dorcas.

"I'm sorry this happened," said Cathcart, "because, after all, a few drops of blood don't touch the heart of the question. We think too much of personal violence, which is really nothing compared with quiet enmity. Poor Winstone!"

"Poor Cathcart," said Eustace, who was continually glancing at the broken weal across the other's cheek.

The Yeoman

"Seeing that I never cared anything for what I looked like," said Cathcart, smiling as well as he was able, "this slight disfigurement doesn't trouble me at all. The difficulty is how to explain it."

"Yes," Eustace assented. "If my father knew just how it happened I'm afraid he'd want to prosecute, and then,—"

"After all," said Cathcart, "we were trespassing."

"That was my fault."

"Never mind whose fault it was. I think the best thing will be to say nothing about it."

"But everyone will notice it!"

"No doubt, but that's no reason for explaining things. It's really much easier than you suppose to keep your own counsel. Self-possession can do wonders. To-night I shall not appear at table; to-morrow a strip of plaster will make me look quite respectable. I'm a bit of a doctor, you know."

So Father Cathcart went to his own rooms, and Eustace explained that he had a headache, and would prefer to remain quiet that night. He felt deeply grateful to his tutor for his reticence, which he knew to be prompted by consideration for him rather than by a wish to spare Richard. In spite of his reiterated determination to go away, Eustace devoutly hoped that Richard would not mention the meeting to Dorcas. Although, at the time, he sincerely intended to attempt his own cure, he shrank from anything calculated to turn her thoughts from him. Indeed, he had no reason to

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believe that they were greatly concerned with him,—rather the opposite. It is curious how the crumbs tempt those who turn their backs upon the feast. He was to forget, but he would by no means have her forget. It was necessary to the healing of his wound that the balm of her remembrance should be bound upon it. Eustace did not realise how truly he was, in this, conforming to the world's way.

Chapter XII

Two in the Look-Out

"STEVE, will you go abroad with Cathcart and me for a few months?"

Eustace was losing no time; he felt that Cathcart's devotion to him deserved this prompt recognition.

"Go abroad?" Steve echoed. "Why on earth should I? I'm quite happy here."

"That's exactly what I said. But it seems I'm considered not to be quite happy, so travel's to put me right and teach me all sorts of things. Will you come?"

"If you want an answer at once," said Steve, "I shall say *no*. But if you give me time to think about it, perhaps"—he broke off to say again, "Why on earth should I?"

Eustace had launched his question without any preparation, rather expecting that Steve would jump at his proposal. But there appeared to have sprung up in that young man also a rooted affection for Melworthy, and a strong disinclination to leave it even for the allurements of foreign travel. For a long time Steve said nothing more, but kept a furtive eye on an open window behind them.

It was a warm, still night at the end of October. The sky had a velvety softness suggestive rather of spring than autumn, though autumn scents were in the air and the indescribable delicate melancholy

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of the waning year. The quiet cove was spangled with star-reflections which now and then were broken by long ripples into a moth-like dance,—then they grew steady again and returned to the semblance of a field of glowworms. The *Eileen* swam motionless, glimmering faintly like a grey dove in shadow.

"How well the year wears down here," said Steve.

"Yes," said Eustace.

"Where do you propose to go, if we go at all?"

"To Italy, first, I believe."

"You seem very indifferent about it."

"I am. All the same, I must go."

"Must?"

"It comes to that when all one's people are of one mind."

"Does Miss Hamer want you to go?"

"I don't know about Dolly, I wasn't thinking about her. But she's sure to agree with the rest."

"I should think she has pretty strong opinions of her own," said Steve, "and wouldn't hesitate to express them."

"There's not much hesitation about Dolly," Eustace said, in that unconcerned, brotherly tone which seems so amazingly unappreciative to the susceptible listener. Eustace was wondering why Steve was so little anxious to leave Melworthy, and his theory to account for Dorcas's apparent indif-

The Yeoman

ference to himself recurred to enlighten him. Perhaps he had a rival in Steve. If that were the case they must both go or both stay; yet a successful rival would cut the knot of his entanglement at once, and be the surest means towards the desired forgetting. Eustace wished himself comfortably out of life at the bottom of the cove.

Steve turned his back on the sea and faced the open window; he wanted to talk to Eustace, he was aching to take him into his confidence,—him, or someone else. Dorcas already understood, although he had not made any definite confession to her; if she saw so clearly, was it possible that Dolly could fail to do the same? Steve's experience of girls was very limited, but on that account he did not, like most young men, indulge in sweeping generalisations. He just watched the window, with the unspoken confidence trembling on his lips, and made a mental picture of Dolly floating towards him in the darkness with all her sweetness breathing about her, yet somehow shut away from him. Eustace, following his own train of thought, asked abruptly:

“Have you seen much of your cousin lately?”

“Richard?” The question appeared disingenuous.

“No,—Dorcas.”

“Not a great deal, more’s the pity.”

“You get on well together?”

“Rather. There’s not a better girl alive.” He spoke with frank enthusiasm. “She understands

The Yeoman

people wonderfully, and she 's full of sympathy and all that."

"What do you mean by 'all that'?"

"Oh, you know, the kind of thing that helps you without your quite knowing why!"

"Helps you in what?"

"When you're a bit worried and muddled over what you ought to do."

"Oh!" said Eustace. Steve did not talk exactly like a lover,—not, at least, as Eustace would have talked.

"She 's rather—reserved, isn't she?" he asked, hesitating over a word that applied only to the new Dorcas of his experience.

"Reserved? She may be with strangers, never with me."

"I suppose she'd consider me a stranger," Eustace ventured to say.

"You? Dear me, no! She told me once you were quite old friends."

"We were friends at one time."

"Have you quarrelled, then?"

"Not quarrelled exactly, but—" At this moment the lighted window framed the figure of a girl; it stood poised lightly, then advanced just as Steve had imagined. The sweetness neared him, overflowed him, then caught him up like a lifting wave and carried him into the region where heart beats are like stars, a region somewhere between earth and the roof of heaven, of inexact geography, yet always crowded with enthusiastic explorers,

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who mislead each other with the best intentions in the world. From those exalted spheres a clear voice called :

"Are you there, Mr. Winstone and Eustace?" To which two very human voices replied, "Yes," and Steve stepped forward to meet the apparition in some surprise that there was solid earth beneath his feet.

Eustace, after a few minutes dragging talk, moved away to pace up and down the terrace, scrunching the gravel under his heel as though each step snapped a strand of opposition. He tried to think of Italy, of changing skies, of Italy's great names, traditions mingled with the dust; but these were faint compared with the imagined joy of a return to England. And this was not merely a delusion in which to set, gem-like, the pathos of that return, for he had the true passion for England in his blood. He loved Melworthy not less than Richard Winstone loved his land, though differently, and with no narrowing of outlook. Above all he loved the sea.

Dolly and Steve, sitting side by side, appeared for some time to have entered into a conspiracy of silence with the night. The friendship between these two had grown very near to both. Steve did not doubt the friendship, he was rather inclined to resent it as a condition difficult to alter. To have come to the definite conclusion that he wished to alter it marked a considerable advance. Yet there he sat, speechless, deliciously conscious of the out-

The Yeoman

ward presence of the girl, with all its subtle suggestiveness of life in repose, its physical completeness, its serene knowledge of itself. But beyond all that, and stronger than it, was his desire to hold the essence of which these things were but symbols, or of which, to his unsoiled imagination, they seemed but symbols. His was the happy love which does not scorch, having roots deep in the best of nature, where are cool and curative waters as well as fires which may purify if they do not kill.

"I wonder why we don't talk to-night," Steve asked.

"It's so much better to leave things unspoken on evenings like this, isn't it? I mean that autumn nights suggest things that we hardly can talk about,—we don't quite understand what they mean ourselves."

"Yes," Steve assented.

"The sea talks differently in the autumn. I'm never sure what it intends to say then."

"Do you know what it intends to say at other times?"

"Oh, yes, I think so," she laughed, softly.

"Tell me."

"I don't think you'd be interested. You see, it wouldn't have the same things to say to me as to you; it knows girls' talk as well as men's."

"I believe," said Steve, with a conviction he did not wholly feel, "that it says the same things to both of us. Shall we go up to the look-out?"

The Yeoman

For answer Dolly rose, and Steve led the way up a narrow path which curved round, near the cliff's edge, into a stone shelter. Its narrow doorway faced seaward; on either side a curved parapet swept round to meet a high wall at the back. Against this wall a stone bench was fixed.

They leaned together over the parapet and listened to the muttering of the sea three hundred feet below. The sound of it came up in a continuous stream, carrying with it, as it were, old memories of hidden caves stored with secret bones and forgotten treasures. Their gaze was lost in the near distance,—tangled in a glimmering darkness as of dewy gossamer in moonlight. Far away to the right shone a semicircle of lights, backed by a faint glow. Steve pointed towards them.

“How clear the front at Wraymouth is tonight!” he said.

“Dear Wraymouth,—it looks like a stranger with all those jewels on.”

“Do you ever feel tired of Melworthy?”

“Tired?” She mused a moment. “No, not exactly tired, except as one might seem to weary of a person one cares for very much only to love him all the more an hour afterwards. Which,” she added, “is not inconstancy, is it?”

“You could never be inconstant,” said Steve.

“That,” she answered, “is a very sweeping statement, and I’m not sure that it’s altogether complimentary.”

“But it’s the truth.”

The Yeoman

“Have you studied me so carefully?”

“I’ve spent the best part of six months in studying you.”

“Suppose I’d seen that, and had made a point of showing you the good side of myself?”

“If I thought you had been at so much pains to impress me I should also think——”

“Hush!”

“What is it?”

“Didn’t you hear someone coming up the path?”

“It’s only Eustace down there,” said Steve. Eustace was still crushing his troubles into the unsympathising gravel. They listened to the far-away sound of his footsteps.

“Have you noticed anything wrong with Eustace lately, Mr. Winstone?”

“No, but then I’m afraid I’ve been too much occupied with my own affairs to trouble much about his.”

“And yet you’re such friends,” Dolly said, reproachfully.

“You mustn’t be angry with me, I can’t help it. I’d do anything in the world for him, Miss Hamer, anything. I love Eustace, I admire him, he’s a dear fellow. Till this evening I didn’t know there was supposed to be anything amiss with him. What is it?”

“That’s just what I don’t know. I thought you might have some idea.”

“You must think me a poor sort of friend!”

The Yeoman

"Mr. Winstone, I believe you're the best friend he could have."

"You make me feel ashamed," cried Steve, flushing. "What have I done to deserve praise from you?"

"A friend needn't *do* much, need he?" asked Dolly. "It's the fact of friendship that's so good. I can see how all one's life might be coloured by it."

"Have girls such friendships as that?"

"With other girls, you mean?"

"Yes, of course," said Steve, who had no wish to stumble into the mire of a discussion on the impersonal subject of men and women friendships.

"Not often, I think. You see," said this young philosopher, "girls' interests are narrower, and where there's less space to move about there's more chance of quarrelling. Besides, they don't trust each other in the same way." Steve did not dispute this, but he felt a half humourous pang when he reflected that neither Eustace nor he was by any means completely in the other's confidence.

"Do you think it would do Eustace good to go abroad?" he asked.

"It would do him no harm. . . . I wish I knew what troubles him."

"He proposed that I should go with him," said Steve, with a tightening at the heart.

"If you only would," cried Dolly. "It would be such a comfort to—to us all to know that you were with him."

The Yeoman

"I would do anything for you."

"For him, you said before," said Dolly. It was a gentle correction, so gentle in tone that the distant Wraymouth lights grew blurred before Steve's eyes.

"Don't you want to go?" she asked, after a pause.

"No, I don't," said Steve, "But that won't prevent me from going if you want me to." He shut his eyes hard, and wished that the faint wind rustling through the look-out would suddenly increase to a gale and blow Dolly into his arms.

"Why don't you?" she asked. He drew a little nearer to her and felt all at once that that slight movement had broken down an invisible barrier between them. The confidence which he had lacked welled up in him, cool and strong.

"Because I don't want to be away from you," he answered. "Unless—" Her hand was resting on the parapet; his closed on it unhesitatingly. A bird began to sing in the girl's ears; it was the music of her own heart, tremulously sweet, utterly strange to her experience, yet understood like a melody echoing up from childhood and breaking in a human cry.

"—Unless I know that wherever I am your love goes with me."

"My love?" It was as though the giving of it could never be enough. "Steve!" She brought the other hand across and laid it simply upon his.

"Wherever you go,"—her voice broke. To both

The Yeoman

of them the silence that followed was like a living witness to the compact; it breathed benediction, and unveiled the first of the mysteries revealed only to the pure in heart.

After that they forgot the Wraymouth lights and the restless footsteps down below and the tang of autumn in the air, for in their hearts there was only spring and the joy of youth. They had no doubts to resolve, no difficulties to overcome which cast a shadow on the future. They talked with assurance of all that the world could give.

“We won’t speak of this, of our——”

“Engagement?” suggested Steve.

“Yes,—until you come back.”

“I must go, then?”

“We mustn’t forget poor Eustace, Steve.”

“No. I’ll go, of course. . . . But you’ll write to me?”

“Sometimes.”

“Why shouldn’t we tell our people at once?”

“Because,—because we’re very young, Steve.”

“Shall we be much older in six months’ time?”

“Much older,” said Dolly. “Think! To love each other for all those days,—why,—” She paused and drew a joyful breath.

“But not to see you for so long!”

“Will you forget me, Steve?” He smoothed the radiant hair that even in the darkness appeared to hold a memory of dawn and murmured, “My love!”

“I shall be with you always, Steve, never

The Yeoman

doubt that. I've been waiting for you ever since I was born; you came to Melworthy just because God wanted us to help each other and be happy."

"You believe that?"

"Of course I do."

"Then so do I." Yet even in his complete happiness Steve wondered what, in the scheme of Providence, their coming to Melworthy was to bring to Richard Winstone.

"Mayn't I tell Eustace?" he asked.

"Y-yes, if you like, Steve."

"And my cousin Dorcas? I wish you knew her better. She's not like her father's child."

"I'll get to know her better," said Dolly, in her overflowing charity. "Steve, have you loved me for long?"

"Do you remember that fly I made for you? Well, that finished me. You looked so beautiful—"

"Am I beautiful?"

They descended the path to the terrace hand in hand, there to encounter the still restless Eustace. Dolly left her brother and Steve together.

"I'll go away with you, old chap," said Steve, linking his arm in his friend's.

"Has Dolly been talking about me?"

"She said she'd like me to be with you."

"So should I; thank you, Steve. To tell you the truth, I'm in a silly sort of state, and the sooner I get away the better."

The Yeoman

"What's wrong?" asked Steve, pressing the other's arm.

"Everything's wrong. I'll tell you, perhaps, after we've started."

"Not now?"

"I can't."

"I'll make a compact with you. When you tell me your trouble I'll tell you a secret of mine." Eustace started and peered into Steve's face; whatever his secret might be, it was at least a happy one.

"It won't make us drift away from each other?"

"I hope not," said Steve. "I hope not."

"I believe you're my best friend, almost my only friend," cried Eustace. "If we can't pull together——"

"We will pull together," said Steve, "we must, or what's the earthly use of being friends?"

It was after midnight when Eustace knocked at Father Cathcart's door. The priest admitted him at once and drew him into the light of the green-shaded reading-lamp by which he worked.

"Well?" he said, looking affectionately into his eyes.

"Steve will come with us,—provided, of course, that his people approve. When can you be ready?"

"In about three weeks."

"As soon as you like."

"Eustace, you don't blame me for taking you away?"

The Yeoman

"How can I blame you," cried Eustace, passionately, "when I see that scar on your face?"

"My boy, forget that. I would bear many scars to save you from one that might cut into your soul. There are wounds that no tears can heal, that no penance can wipe away. I speak to you man to man, and out of my great love for you."

Cathcart spoke with a quivering earnestness to which Eustace had no reply. He wrung his hand and left him.

Chapter XIII

Confidences

AT this period time dragged for all those vitally concerned in this narrative. Even to Dolly and Steve the few days that remained before their parting fluttered, broken-winged, rather than flew. Happiness does not always make the minutes swift and feather-light, and to those two there were times when they could have wished them swifter and more bright, that the parting might be sooner over and the reunion nearer. They spoke of this feeling candidly to one another, and laughed at its seeming contradiction. To Eustace every day was a link in a dragging chain; to Richard Winstone each hour brought the inevitable nearer, and he knew it, hardening himself in a bitterness of soul that was almost heroic. And Dorcas went quietly about her household matters, accepting her lot with all possible patience, and keeping unsoiled within herself those well-springs of affection from which a strong man might drink and find new meaning in the coil of life.

The first days of November brought sullen storms without cold; heavy clouds swept over the downs and up the coombe, trailing their shadows blackly across sodden fields, and woods which only needed sunlight to transform them into royally apparelled mourners for the year's ending. The beach of the Cove was crowded with fishing boats whose

The Yeoman

owners went about amongst them aimlessly, gazed seaward, shook their heads, and gathered into groups to discuss bad times and the general decline of Melworthy. Then the wind changed, clouds broke and vanished, the sun shone, and the bellying sails passed over the bar and out to the harvest of the blue. Bad times,—who spoke of them?

Dorcas heard the gate click. She looked up from the board on which she was rolling paste and called: "Run, Lizzie, and see who it is." The girl returned, and with many smiles announced that Mr. Stephen Winstone was in the parlour. Dorcas turned down her sleeves, dusted the flour from her hands, and went to him at once. Their greeting was cordially affectionate.

"Are you alone to-day?" Steve asked.

"Yes, father's gone to Bristol on business." Of late Richard had frequently gone to Bristol on business; each time he returned it was with a more pronounced faculty for silence.

"We haven't seen you for ever so long. How's that?"

"You know," said Dorcas, with a steady smile.

"It's cruelly hard on you, cousin." He was silent for a moment. Then, with a bright laugh and a flush:

"I've news for you, Dorcas."

"I see it's good," she said. "I'm glad."

"Can you guess what it is?" Her eyes told him that she knew, but she leaned forward eagerly with

The Yeoman

clasped hands and said: "Tell me, Steve." She watched his face with an intentness that seemed athirst.

"Dolly,—Miss Hamer, you know,—well, one evening I found myself telling her——"

"All about it? That's right, Steve."

"It came on me all at once, and I couldn't keep it in. I suppose it always comes with a rush like that?"

"I dare say," said Dorcas.

"So far as we're concerned it's all settled, but we're to keep the affair secret for a time."

"Is that why you're telling me?"

"I had her permission to tell you."

They sat for a long time without speaking, each glad to let the conversation drop into inner communing. Dorcas rejoiced in Steve's happiness with most complete sincerity; just as he spoke and looked, with frank simplicity, just so would she have had a brother speak if God had given her one. For his sake she was glad, drawn towards him afresh by the intimate human sympathy which, at such a time, links any two hearts not soured or soiled; yet she felt that she, herself, stood more alone than ever, for the love of lovers is engrossing, and the little ripples which before were scattered for the world's refreshment are turned into the single channel. She suspected it would be so with herself if ever—she closed her eyes and listened to an inner voice which whispered words she hardly understood. Words? Music rather, and that so

The Yeoman

strangely beautiful that when her lids parted their lashes were heavy with tears.

“Dorcas,—why, you mustn’t cry!”

“No? Well, I won’t, Steve. Tell me more.”

“That’s all. When I come back we’re to let our people know.”

“When you come back?”

“Didn’t I tell you? Eustace and I are going abroad.”

“Abroad?”

“Yes. Is it so wonderful?” Steve laughed and set his hands firmly on the arms of his chair.

“But do you want to go away—just now?”

“No, but Dolly wishes me to go, and I’m obedient. It seems that a change will do Eustace good, and as we’re friends we go together. Cathcart’s coming, too.”

“How long will you be away?”

“Perhaps six months, perhaps three; it all depends.”

“On what?”

“On Eustace. You may be sure I shall be anxious to get back. No one appears to know quite what’s wrong with him,—perhaps he doesn’t know himself,—but, somehow, I think he does. Poor chap, he’s low enough. I dare say he’ll tell me all about it some day.”

Dorcas closed her eyes again, but this time no tears swelled the lids. Was it possible that she was driving Eustace away? The thought stabbed her keenly, yet if it were so it was best that he

The Yeoman

should go. In that little world down there it was so difficult to forget,—how difficult her own heart told her a thousand times. A month or two away from Melworthy would cure him. As for herself, all would go on as before; the usual round,—work, rest, a little play; the shortening days, the dragging winter; then lengthening days, and the delight of returning spring. If she had loved him, if by any chance they had been thrown together daily, she would still have let him go, and borne her woman's part in secret, and unflinchingly,—that was the Winstone way. But as it was, on her side there was no sacrifice. She would only, perhaps, feel a little more lonely in the knowledge that another friend was out of reach. And she was becoming used to loneliness, it seemed part of her lot, just as others become used to pain.

“Why, Steve, everyone will be going soon!”

“Was that what you were thinking?”

“Perhaps I was dreaming a little as well,” she said, with that sweet, wistful smile which Steve had learned to look for.

“Dreaming that you'd like to get away from Melworthy too?”

“No, no. I shall never get away from Melworthy.”

“You're as fond of the place as Ford. . . . Poor old Ford!”

“Why do you speak like that?” Dorcas's hands stirred in her lap; the fingers unclasped and closed again.

The Yeoman

"He's such a good fellow and has had such a rough time of it. Why, if I was to lose Dolly now as he lost the girl he was going to marry, I should go mad. But I'm not so strong in the head as Ford. It didn't even sour him; you can see that?"

"Did she die?" Dorcas asked the question very softly and without raising her eyes.

"Yes. I thought you'd heard the story. But it was worse than ordinary dying. She was killed right there before his eyes."

Dorcas drew a deep breath, but did not speak. Steve lowered his voice and went on:

"They were riding through the bush together, not far from our homestead; we called the place Melworthy, you know. They had to cross a dry water-course,—it had been a deep stream a week or two before,—and its bed was full of nasty treacherous stones. There wasn't much light, and I dare say they were talking,—well, as Dolly and I might talk. Her horse hadn't been broken long and wasn't very sure on his feet. He stepped on a loose stone, and came down. . . . That's all. She never spoke afterwards."

Dorcas was still silent; she did not move.

"It was a terrible thing," Steve continued. "We thought at first that he'd give under, but he didn't; he came through it all without being spoiled a bit. Perhaps it made him work harder, if that were possible; he has a passion for work still."

"When did this happen?"

"Three years ago."

The Yeoman

She said no more, but sat there so quietly that Steve found himself watching her with a curious interest. What wonderful repose she had, he thought, what a power of silent sympathy; sympathy radiated from her like heat from a fire. She was a woman on whom a man might lean when strength was needed to face life's larger issues.

The pale November sunshine fell full upon her, touching her beauty delicately, seeming to warm, as it reached her, to a memory of vanished summer. Her hands, still clasped, lay motionless in her lap. But all at once the repose vanished, she lifted a face to Steve full of terror and pity and a wondering pain, and then she crouched together and broke into passionate weeping.

"Dorcas, Dorcas!" Steve ran to her and threw an arm about her shoulder. "Dorcas, I didn't mean to hurt you like this. I didn't know I was so good a story-teller." He tried to laugh, but the quivering figure under his touch broke the attempt.

"To die like that!" she sobbed. "Poor Ford! Now I understand why you called him that."

"Yes, yes, but you mustn't suppose he's unhappy now. Ford's no coward; he always takes a blow standing. Of course, he doesn't forget,—who could? He'll never forget, but there may be comfort in remembering."

"Yes," she murmured, "but a memory—what's that to live on?"

"Not much, perhaps. But he never mopes, he's

The Yeoman

too strong for that. He's young still, Dorcas, and may love again. I've known fellows—" He broke off, feeling instinctively that other fellows had not much in common with Ford. Dorcas lifted her face to him again.

"Steve, I'm—sorry—for this. You mustn't mind. It came on me all at once—like—your—" She smiled through her tears, and took Steve's hand between both her own. "You're a good boy, you'll be happy, Steve. There, you'd better leave me to get over my foolishness."

"It wasn't foolishness," Steve protested. "Any girl would have done the same."

"I don't think that makes it less foolish." She smiled again, and rose, leaning on his shoulder. "When do you start?"

"In about a week."

"So soon?"

"Eustace seems anxious to get away."

"I shall see you again before you go?"

"Why, yes, of course." He stooped and kissed her forehead. "You won't mind that, I know,—sister Dorcas."

He did not see the flush that crimsoned her from throat to brow.

When she was alone she wept no more, but returned almost at once to her pastry making. She dared not weep, though tears would have been better than the mood into which she fell. It seemed to her that the world was all awry, for wherever she looked were deaths and partings and the shad-

The Yeoman

ows of impending strife. The November night closed in, and closed, too, about her heart with a sense of chilling desolation. Lizzie's chatter ceased in the twilight; she had matters to think of which made even her serious in the time of grey tones. Amos Flower, a young cousin of Job, was a long time making up his mind; if he wanted her it was time he said so,—she wouldn't have him dangling after her just for his own pleasure. But when he called for her she went out with him as willingly as she had always done, and Dorcas was left alone. A month earlier Richard had dismissed the other two maids; it was what she wanted him to do before her mother's death. Dorcas understood what their going meant,—a saving of a few pounds a year. She asked no questions, however, and Richard offered no explanation beyond saying that they were lazy and good-for-nothing. Perhaps they were.

Chapter XIV

The Flare on the Hillside

RICHARD was late. He had said he would walk from Chesterton or get a lift in some neighbour's trap. At ten o'clock Dorcas began to grow anxious,—if he had had to walk it was already past the hour when he should have reached home. She went out to the gate, leaving the door open behind her; a stream of light followed her and glimmered on the trunks of the gate-side sycamores.

She looked up and down the road; not a living thing moved. There was no sound save the rustle of wind in the dry yellow leaves above, or the stir of them on the ground below; now and then a little cluster escaped, danced fantastically for a moment, spun on withered rims, and settled down to be trodden into earth. The stars shone clearly in a sky deep and moonless; seaward a hardly distinguishable mist hung, not rising much above the line of the downs which stood black and solemn against it. Dorcas conjectured there would be the first frost before morning.

She thought of Steve and Dolly, and mapped out a future for them which was all golden. She prayed that it might be so; she prayed also for Ford and for herself, not coupling the names, but asking for both such strength as might bring them to the end in peace; a strange prayer for young lips that had hardly yet learned to lisp life's alphabet.

The Yeoman

She felt refreshed and comforted; the great spaces and the silence soothed her as such vastness must always soothe those who have entered into the spirit of earth's austere and tender heart. Death, pain, loss, all were there; but behind them meanings greater than the agonies,—meanings, alas, veiled from all save the strongest in moments of the toppling surge of passion or of grief.

Presently, a little to the left, on the further slope of the coombe, her eye was caught by a glimmering, swaying curtain that flapped here and there aimlessly at its upper extremity, but below was motionless; it widened, deepened, then breaking outward like a rent sail, belched out its fearful message in a shower of sparks. A long banner of flame shot skyward, licking through the smoke. Dorcas peered intently, wonderingly,—she could not at first recall any building at that point. Then, with a cry, she ran round to Job Flower's cottage.

Mrs. Flower was sitting with Benjy on her knees; he would not go to sleep.

"Bess, Bess!" cried Dorcas. "Where's Job? The new dairy's on fire!"

"Job's out. . . . Vire?" She rose in hot haste and set Benjy on his feet; then she threw off her apron.

"Where is he?"

"Doän't know," said Bess, her eyes brightening. "Benjy, sonny, there's a vire, do 'ee year that?" The boy looked up helplessly and held out a hand to Dorcas.

The Yeoman

"We must have help!" cried Dorcas, breathlessly. "Father isn't home yet."

"There 'll he help 'nough," said Bess, drawing Benjy to the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To zee the vire, vor sure."

"Not with Benjy?"

"Benjy can run zo well 's another. I can't leave un yere."

"Don't take him, Bess!" cried Dorcas. But Mrs. Flower was out and away, leaving Dorcas to close the door after her.

Dorcas followed and fled round to the house again. At the gate she encountered Richard.

"Father,—" she pointed across the coombe, "Look! Ford's dairy 's on fire!"

"I see that!" he said grimly.

"Won't you come and help?"

"Why should I? He can build another."

"But some one may be killed,—the horses——"

Richard turned his back and walked into the house. "I'll mind my own affairs," he said.

"Father!" cried Dorcas again. But he did not answer her.

She ran towards the glare in the sky, taking the straightest course she could, now losing sight of the wavering signal in a dip or patch of wood, now emerging to see it brighter than before. Already the dread news was well abroad; here and there a voice called; she heard plodding footsteps to right and left of her, and heavy breathing; sometimes

The Yeoman

a figure passed her and vanished in the darkness. All about her seemed stirrings of alarm; her own fancy and her labouring heart created them. Once she fell in a ploughed field, rose, and sped on again. As she mounted the coombe-side the blood drummed in her ears, her breath came in hard gasps that tore her with pain. But she was in the light of the blazing building now; it towered before her, a swaying wall of smoke topped with banners and flying pennons of flame. The bewildering roar of the conflagration, added to the drumming in her ears, made a clamour like a great sea besieging rocks.

It was only when she found herself one of a murmuring crowd that she realised her helplessness. She stood there gazing, panting, trembling in the blistering heat, absolutely useless. She could not even make one of the long line of men that passed full and empty buckets from hand to hand. Full, empty, full, empty,—up they came and back they went, but the fire blazed on, turning their impotent efforts to spurts of steam. To the leeward of the building sparks flew in hissing showers; some were caught in the draggled branches of an elm, shone for a moment, and went out. Strangely, the tree did not catch fire. Someone in the crowd said it was the fifth of November, and laughed.

The dairyman, with his wife and child, had been dragged, protesting, from his bed. He appeared to be hardly awake yet; he could do nothing but stare foolishly and pass his hand across his mouth.

The Yeoman

The woman clasped her child and thought of nothing else. Dorcas moved about looking for Ford. Just as the hand-engine from Chesterton galloped up, scattering the crowd, she saw him. He had only just arrived.

"Dorcas, you here? I've only been back from Wraymouth ten minutes. Where are the horses? . . . Fools!"

He sprang forward to the stable, crying, "The horses!" Dorcas shrank back; she had thought of the horses and forgotten them again. Ford snatched a hatchet from a shouting fireman and shattered the lock; he disappeared in a rush of smoke. In the silence that followed the scream of the terrified creatures within made men turn pale.

"Make way!" There was a sudden clattering of hoofs on the stones, their dull thud on the turf, the sudden sight of staring eyes, green with terror, of wide nostrils, of foaming lips,—a flash, no more, and one rescued captive was far away into the cool night.

Another cry rose up,—shrill, beseeching,—a woman's cry. Dorcas ran towards a little knot of folks; they were standing on tiptoe, stooping, elbowing to get a sight of something on the ground.

"Benjy, Benjy," the voice wailed, "sonny!"

The staring watchers made way for Dorcas, and there in their midst was Mrs. Flower, wringing her hands, weeping, moaning, doing everything but the right thing over the still form of Benjy. Dor-

The Yeoman

cas knelt down and raised the boy's head; his poor meaningless eyes were wide open, dull, the pupils contracted.

"Be quiet, Bess. . . . And you, go away!" She swept her arm round the crowd; they scattered, looking back over slant shoulders. Here at least was something for Dorcas to do.

"I was standin' just yere," said Mrs. Flower, "when the 'oss flung by. I couldn't pull un back quick 'nough. It zet his voot on un."

"Oh, Bess, why did you bring him?"

Benjy lay quite still; when Dorcas tried to move him a faint groan gurgled in his throat and his eyelids quivered.

"Bring a hurdle, over in that corner—quick!" It was Ford's voice. He stood beside Dorcas smoke-grimed, his hair singed; he held one hand behind his back,—its palm was deeply bitten by a hot bar he had grasped in his work of rescue. He called the fire-brigade captain.

"Let the place burn out," he said, "you can do no good. The sooner it's over the better. There's nothing alive there now,—one horse was dead when I got in. . . . Yes, stay to damp down the embers if you like."

The men approached with the hurdle. Ford helped Dorcas to lay Benjy on it.

"You, Tom Ensor, ride for the doctor. You and you," he indicated two of his own men, "carry the boy home,—two can manage it, he doesn't weigh much. The rest of you," he raised his voice,

The Yeoman

"stay where you are, or better still, go home. We don't want a crowd after us. . . . Now off!"

The bearers moved away; Mrs. Flower followed. She had ceased her wailing; over her terror at the accident began to creep the fear of what Job would say. She had not seen him in the crowd.

"Wait there a moment," said Ford, and he left Dorcas standing alone.

She watched the bearers drop slowly down the hillside in the unsteady light of the fire; at one moment they stood out sharp and clear, the next they were shadows wavering into darkness. It seemed to Dorcas that in all that restless turmoil only one thing was still,—the crushed body of the injured boy.

Presently she saw three figures cross the bearers' path; they paused to ask a question, and sped on. She recognised Steve first, then Eustace and his sister. Realising that she stood in a conspicuous position she moved away, and once more faced the burning building. The three disappeared in the crowd far to her right.

Above all things she desired to avoid a meeting with them at that moment. There was something in the circumstances to break down barriers, to beget illusions, to make the impossible appear likely and not wholly remote from actuality. In the presence of conquering elements men may forget the obligations of the normal, and awake, later, to find the normal confronting them like a wall

The Yeoman

of steel. Dorcas grasped this without defining the position to herself.

She watched eagerly for Ford's return; the ring of his unhesitating voice still sounded in her ears;—he, alone of that pack of men, appeared to have the faculty of command. She recalled the story she had heard that afternoon, and pictured him equally firm and collected under the shock of that misfortune to which this was no more than child's play. She herself had suffered, but upon her had fallen no such eclipsing darkness as had swooped on him. To have come through that unembittered and unspoiled made him, in her eyes, a prince of men. If he had died,—she had heard that men had died for love,—she would not so have exalted him, for in her, also, was the battling instinct which sees more beauty in scars than in a quiet ending. They met on that common ground of endurance; they were in arms together. It was an inspiring thought to Dorcas. She clung to it passionately, not asking why. She seemed to hear him pleading with her to hold fast to certainties, to thrust dreams aside, to make hope a servant, but no master. Or was it her own voice that spoke to her heart so valiantly, bidding it be still?

She saw him approaching, and took a step forward to meet him.

"Come," he said, "we 'll go to the youngster now. The bonfire can look after itself."

They went down into the coombe side by side, trying to read each other's faces by the glare. Eus-

The Yeoman

tace saw Dorcas when it was too late, and turned his attention to the fire again. There was not much left to burn. The new dairy fell in upon itself with a dull crash and flung up a last triumphant column of flame. Three miles out at sea the fishermen saw it and wondered; startled gulls wheeled from the cliff-face with shrill clamour, circled slowly above the downs, and went to rest again.

Chapter XV

A Discovery

"**T**HAT's the last of it," Ford said, as the rumble of the collapse reached them. "Our candle's out. Take my arm, Dorcas; we don't want any more accidents to-night."

For a while Dorcas could see nothing; but Ford strode on without any slackening of pace. Presently her eyes became accustomed to the change; the quiet starlight reasserted itself, and by the time they reached the other side of the coombe her eyes were able to take in the familiar outlines of the landscape, beautifully softened to a tone of rest. She had some difficulty in keeping up with Ford's long stride.

"I'm going too fast for you," he said, slackening. "A thing of this sort makes one feel like running."

"How did it happen?"

"Goodness knows. I dare say," he added, "we shall never know."

"Do you think it was an accident?"

"What else could it have been?"

"Someone,—" Dorcas paused.

"No, no, we won't think of that. After all, it doesn't matter much, except for the poor little beggar who's hurt."

"Poor Benjy. . . . I begged Mrs. Flower not to take him."

The Yeoman

“ You saw her, then, before you started? ”

“ I was in the garden, waiting for father to come home, when I saw the light.”

“ Yes? ”

“ I ran round at once to ask Job to come and help.”

“ Yes? ”

“ But he wasn’t in, and so I went up alone.”

“ Well, don’t trouble your head any more about it, Dorcas. Perhaps it’s as well the place has gone. Some people used to call it ‘ Winstone’s folly.’ ”

“ But it paid, didn’t it? ”

“ Yes, it was beginning to pay well.”

“ Then you ’ll build another, won’t you? ”

“ It’s too soon to think of that yet,” he laughed. “ Perhaps,—but no, I don’t think I shall rebuild, Dorcas.” He did not add that he feared the same result.

“ But I thought, when you made up your mind, you always carried a thing through.”

“ It isn’t always possible to do that,” he said. “ Once before I made up my mind, but that wasn’t enough.” She understood what was in his thoughts.

The doctor had not yet arrived, and Mrs. Flower was in a condition of utter helplessness. When Ford and Dorcas entered the cottage she had not got so far as undressing the injured boy. In taking off his jacket,—it was the green velvet and lace affair,—she had discovered that one arm was limp

The Yeoman

and wet; a glance at her sticky fingers took all the strength from her.

"Leave him to me, Mrs. Flower," Ford said. "I'm used to this kind of thing; you needn't look. Sit there." He put her into a chair with her back to the light. Then he took a knife from his pocket and ripped up the sleeve.

"Can you stand it, Dorcas?"

"Yes, oh, yes," she said. The arm was badly fractured, a point of splintered bone showing through the torn flesh.

"How quiet the little chap is."

"He can't speak," said Dorcas. "He's what they call a simple, a——"

"Good God!" Ford felt the body over tenderly. "I think that's all," he said. "We shall need hot water presently. Will you see to it? Mrs. Flower had better stay where she is."

The fire on the open hearth was out, and no sticks were ready. Dorcas took a horn lantern from its nail on the wall and went out to the wood-house at the back. A spar-hook was sticking in the block, but no wood was cut; apparently Job had been interrupted, for some beech twigs lay close at hand just as they had been pulled from the stack that stood out from the wall. As she stooped her eye was caught by something in the corner, and a penetrating odour reached her. She paused motionless for an instant, then stepped forward with the lantern held close to the black earth. In the corner was a little pile of shavings, and it was from

The Yeoman

them that the smell came,—the smell of petroleum. There was material for fire-lighting ready to her hand.

She stared downward with fascinated eyes, one hand holding the lantern, the other hanging nerveless at her side. She saw again the towering flames, heard their devouring roar, saw the terrified horse and the drawn features of the injured boy. Something caught at her heart, stifling its pulse; she leant forward against the wall, resting her forehead in the crook of her arm, hiding her eyes, fighting against the weakness that overwhelmed her.

To her the meaning of what she had chanced upon shone clear, yet the grounds for her certainty might, to another, appear mere conjecture, almost criminally foundationless. But she knew, she knew. The vague fear by which she had been shadowed for so long had taken demon shape and struck its blow,—the result smoked on the hill-side. Yet what was that compared with the result to the poor stricken, speechless creature whose shrinking flesh shot pain's message to a brain that could not understand? Had not retribution at once sped to its work, a winged arrow from God? Was not that enough?

There was a deeper pang and a more awful to endure ready to press home into the first wound. Her father! Had he prompted this? Nay, had his own hand touched the unclean thing and he, so, fallen from his last defence into the worst of bond-

The Yeoman

age? Dorcas had long realised that in the mad pride which was his master and his curse lay his only hope of salvation,—not material salvation—she felt that to be past hope,—but such salvation as may be found in dignified defeat. If that were gone, what remained but humiliation and disgrace? His blood ran in her veins, she saw him in herself in a thousand little ways. To know him guilty of a shameful act would be to weaken her hold upon herself. It was not a selfish thought; her mind was fixed on him.

Should she tell Ford? For the present, at least, she decided to keep silence. She felt that it was a case in which strict justice should not be arbiter. She believed that if he knew he would be merciful, but at what a cost to her father and to herself. Some day Richard might repent and be his own advocate,—it was possible, she even believed it probable. As for Job Flower, part of his punishment had come already.

The thought of Benjy roused her. She cut a bundle of lighting twigs, and was about to split a birch log, when a heavy footstep sounded in the pebbly yard. She looked up and saw Job Flower under the doorway. Their eyes met; his gaze wandered uneasily round the shed and returned to hers with a quiver of the eyelids; his face was pale, patched here and there with bronze blotches, the wrinkles deep-cut at the drawn corners of his mouth.

“Leäve thic to me,” he said, holding out a hand

The Yeoman

for the hook. She gave it to him and took up the bundle of twigs.

“Job, you know——”

“Yes, doctor’s in there.” He bent over the block and struck a blow that only peeled a shaving of grey bark. Then he drew himself up again.

“Miss Dorcas, you’ll zee arter the little chap? Bess——” His brows drew together darkly and he aimed a savage blow at the log, splitting it through the heart.

“You mustn’t think it was all her fault, Job.”

“Whose was ’t, then?” Dorcas did not answer, but her eyes went involuntarily to the corner. She could not tell whether Job saw the look.

She paused for a moment outside the door to take a breath of cooling air. The stars had a sharp cold glimmer and the roof ridge glittered. It was the night of the first frost.

Doctor Stanton was waiting impatiently. His examination was over,—he wanted to get to work.

“It’s always the way in these places,” he grumbled,—“never anything one wants. I suppose they think a doctor should carry hot water about with him. Of all the helpless souls,”—he waved his hand towards Mrs. Flower’s back and shook his head. “Half of ‘em,” he stooped to Ford’s ear, “have no business to have children at all. I could tell you stories, Mr. Winstone, that’d make your hair stand up. They know no more than three-day-old puppies, and what’s worse they won’t learn. This poor little devil’d much better

The Yeoman

die, much better,"—he was still whispering to Ford, "but he won't; I can save him, therefore I must. Conscience, sir, is the curse of my profession. If I had a free hand,—" he waved his arm again to suggest that he would make a clean sweep.

Job was so long coming that Dorcas ran out again to the wood-house. He had been busy over something else; the corner was clear.

She helped the doctor to wash and dress the injured arm, keeping her nerve even when Benjy gave a tortured animal cry over its setting. Ford watched every movement of both; he also watched Job, who apparently could not endure the sight of his boy's suffering. The old man moved to and fro clumsily, trying to make no noise, until the doctor told him abruptly to sit down or go away. Then his voice softened: "Everything matters, Flower, although you mightn't think it. Folks hereabouts call me rusty,—it's well for them I am. If I didn't put my foot down they'd make a circus in a sick-room." Job sat down on the edge of an oak chest and buried his face in great coarse hands; he did not go near his wife.

When all was over Dorcas drew a chair to Benjy's bedside. "I'll wait till he goes to sleep," she said.

"So will I," said Ford. "I must see things through," he explained to Doctor Stanton, "because it was my horse that mangled him."

"Have you a conscience, too?" asked the doctor,

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preparing to go. His bag of instruments shut with a snap.

"Well, yes, I suppose you 'd call it that."

"Then get rid of it," said the doctor. "Good night, I shall call in the morning."

"I'll have a nurse over from Wraymouth to-morrow," said Ford. The doctor paused in the doorway.

"Sir," he said, "mind your own business. If a nurse is necessary I'll send one myself." They heard him climb into his gig and drive away.

Chapter XVI

A Night of Watching

DORCAS and Ford sat together by the bedside in a little room which opened out of the kitchen sitting-room on the ground floor. Such light as entered it came through the open doorway. Ford's back was turned to this doorway, but Dorcas could see any movement that took place beyond by glancing slightly to her left. She wished that Ford would go, yet his presence was like a tonic to her, and she could not find words or strength to dismiss him. The draught which the doctor had given Benjy was already having its effect. His eyes had closed and he breathed quietly.

"We shan't forget to-night, Dorcas." Ford's whisper was not loud enough to reach beyond her ear.

"No," she assented.

"If it were not for that," he nodded towards the bed, "I don't think I should feel sorry for what 's happened." She stirred uneasily and bent over to look at Benjy. "After all," he went on, "it was perhaps a bit selfish of me to put up the place and run it on paying lines. I didn't need more money. I only wanted something to do, and having been brought up in a forward sort of school I wanted to make the best of the thing."

"You were quite right," said Dorcas. "You

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gave better value for people's money than they got before. You were really doing good."

"So you thought it all out like that?" Ford smiled, leaning forward with arms between his knees and his fingertips joined and pointing downward.

"Yes. Didn't you look at it like that?"

"I did, of course, but others didn't. . . . I think I'll consider the experiment closed."

"But you'll make enquiries about—about how the fire was caused?"

"Well, yes, but I shall discover nothing." He spoke with conviction. Something like a sob of relief broke from Dorcas; she could not keep it back.

"One never does find out anything of that sort, you know; but all kinds of suspicions are aroused, and men are set against one another, and there's no knowing what harm's done. It's better left alone."

"Ford, may I thank you for——"

"What, Dorcas?" He smiled again, raised his eyes to hers, dropped them, then drew himself upright and clasped his hands behind his head.

"For thinking so much of others."

"My dear child, even supposing that were true, which I don't admit, there's nothing for you to thank me for. Look at a man like Stanton. He spends his life in the service of other people, pay or no pay, but it won't be till he's dead that they'll

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know what his real worth was. They 'll miss his grumbling then."

Dorcas heard a movement in the next room; Mrs. Flower had turned her chair so as to face Job, who still sat on the oak chest, his legs gathered up awkwardly against it. There was fear in her face, but also something better than fear. Perhaps it was hardly love; perhaps, after fifteen years of carp-ing and petty injustice and miserable discontent, love was over and done with; but it was something like love, a memory, at least, of evenings when the full blood had made a simple music and there was tenderness in rough hands; a memory of hope to be fulfilled in the pangs of motherhood,—a fulfil-ment, alas, bare of all save weakness and mere breath. It was the woman who had suffered most, foolish as she was; it was the woman who first felt pity.

She looked at Job intently, as though to draw his gaze to hers. But his face was still hidden in his hands, and he appeared unaware that she had moved. Bess rose, crossed the floor awkwardly, drew close to him with indrawn lips, and touched him on the shoulder. He shook her fingers away with a petulant gesture and moved further along the chest. Instead of going away she slipped down into the place he had left vacant, threw one arm about his shoulder, and with the other hand gently uncovered his face. Dorcas held her breath.

He did not spurn Bess as the girl had feared he might,—no; at first he just stared at her like a man

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awakened from a dream, appeared to gather his thoughts together by an effort, shook his head as one does at a slight pain, and then, with a curious touch of diffidence, patted her hair. Bess dropped her cheek against his shoulder and began to cry quietly. It was plain that Job did not approve of this development, but he endured it, and even went so far as to give his wife's head another pat and to thrust his own soiled handkerchief into her hand. Dorcas, at that, looked away with a lump in her throat; so small an indication of kindness wiped out half Job's crime in her eyes; if it were to have so happy a result as this beginning promised, perhaps it had been permitted for that end. But so simple a solution could not content her long; the old horror swept back in greater force after its temporary easement, and she saw herself carried away from Ford and all the best of life by that one wild deed upon the hillside. A fierce flame of resentment burnt in her against those whose madness shut her out from what seemed, for a brief moment, the desired haven. Her hands clenched; her breast shook; her teeth closed together against a bitter cry.

Ford had been watching her. Perhaps he understood her better than she knew.

"There's no need for this," he said. He lifted one of her hands and unlocked the fingers.

"For what?" She looked at him, startled.

"See, here are the marks of your nails."

She flushed crimson and tried to withdraw her

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hand. He retained it for a moment, then let it fall gently.

"Don't think I want to preach to you," he said; "I'm not fit to preach to anyone. But I'd just like to say that if you endure patiently you 'll have your reward. That 's a poor word, though,—reward. I mean that you 'll come through better than you expected. I wouldn't talk like this if I didn't know."

"Steve told me—" Dorcas began hurriedly, and paused. Perhaps the subject was too sore to be touched upon.

"About my little romance?" asked Ford, quietly.

"Yes. It—I—I'm so sorry," she stammered.

"Well, that was an experience that taught me most of what I know. It had to be gone through alone,—and at times I was almost swamped. Dorcas, death 's the most awful thing; not for those who die, but for the ones who see the grave. You know something of that yourself."

She nodded, and he went on:

"I didn't want to live myself a bit,—but there were the others. That was the chain that held me. Then, after a time, the balance began to come right again. It 's cowardly to throw up the sponge; what you've got to do is to hold on tight."

He spoke musingly, smoothing the coverlid very gently with his fingers. She could not see his face.

Mrs. Flower stood in the doorway. "Mid I come in?" she asked.

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Dorcas made way for her, whispering, "Benjy's asleep."

The poor mother bent over the sleeping boy, yearning to kiss, yet not daring to disturb him. She loved him best when he was asleep; then he seemed more like other children, his silence did not tear the heart; also the vacant eyes were closed, and in her sight he was beautiful. The poor, clumsy, half-developed soul of her became great by reason of the sorrow she had borne uncomplainingly. She would always be a slattern, vain, foolish, agog for the smallest crumb of gross excitement; yet she would always bear about her, as well, something sacred, unsuitable, beyond the reach of change,—her mother love.

"Will 'er get well?" she asked. "'Er wun't—wun't allus have a scammed arm?"

"No, no," said Ford. "Don't be afraid. Benjy shall get quite well."

"Do it hurt un much?"

"Not now. See how he sleeps." The sight was too much for Bess; she had to risk a kiss.

"Job 'an't spoke but a word or two," she murmured, looking from one to the other. "'Er's kind, but so quiet 's a mouse. 'Er's main vond o' the little lad. I year'd un mum'lē just now 'I'm sorry, ay, tarr'ble zorry!' 'Twas vor Benjy there."

Ford turned his head aside. "You'll stay with him to-night, Mrs. Flower? He's safe enough, but be might wake up and want something."

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"Vor zure I'll stay wi' un. Why, 'tis marnin' now."

Yes, it was morning,—but dawn was still far off. The church clock at West Melworthy struck three. The sound of the notes came crisp and clear, floating across still fields, black plantations, hardening furrows; over cottages where huddled, dreamless sleepers were gathering new strength for toil, and out across the long swell of the sea to the heaving fishing-fleet. Benjy slept on. For him, also, there were no dreams, no vague terrors such as often snatched at him in his double darkness. The blessed opiate had given him complete oblivion.

"Come," said Ford; "now that all's safe we can go."

He stepped into the other room and took up his hat. Dorcas followed him.

"Good night, Mr. Flower," he said. Job nodded, but did not appear to see the proffered hand. Ford still kept it extended. "This isn't a time for grudges," he continued. "I know you haven't thought much of me and my doings, but forget all that. If I've ever done you an unintentional wrong, forgive it. If you've ever done me a wrong, I forgive you, freely,—and there's my hand upon it."

Job's eyes rose slowly to meet Ford's; he passed his hand across his mouth, let it fall, raised it to give a pull at his neckcloth, and finally extended it to meet the other's grasp.

"Zir, I be tarr'ble zorry," he said. His mind

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seemed to be wandering. "I've a-gone wrong a bit; 'twere madness like. If I'd a-known—" Suddenly Dorcas realised that he was on the verge of a confession. If it were to come at all, she could not bear it then and in her presence,—the humiliation of it, the burning shame, the contrast between Ford's generosity and the cruel plotting that had resulted in the night's evil work. She caught Ford's arm and said, trying to control her hurried breathing:

"Please take me home. I—I think—if you don't,—I shall do—something—foolish."

He led her out at once, supporting her tenderly. The click of the door-latch behind her brought instant relief.

"I'm afraid the strain has been too much for you, Dorcas."

"A little," she said. He did not speak of Job; indeed, he, as much as she, had wished to avoid a confession at that moment. He desired to keep the knowledge from her; she had enough to bear without that. He recognised that it was mainly on her account that he was generous; he bestowed no credit on himself. He had been reared in a school which demands, and very properly, the utmost justice for such crimes as he believed Job to have been guilty of. But he also recognised in the man himself qualities of blind devotion which merited something better than bare justice.

Each desired that the other should not know; there was the mistake; and, in the circumstances,

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with two such finely human souls, an inevitable mistake. The purest motives, the most generous impulses, do not always hew a clear path through the world's tangles,—nay, they may lead to the edge of the abyss. The verge of darkness is dotted with such signals,—watchfires lit by experience for the unwary; but for every watchfire there are a dozen lives that have passed on, nobly unheeding, and been engulfed. These two saw only good in silence.

Ford paused with his hand on the gate; its top bar was coated with rime. A light still shone from the parlour window.

“Father’s sitting up,” said Dorcas.

There was as yet no sign of light, yet dawn hung imminent, proclaimed by its heralds. A little wind awoke, moaned, and ceased. Leaves chattered, a cock crew. A universal sigh, as of stirring sleepers, seemed to rise skyward and return to earth. Over the downs, dropping to them in a gentle rain of sound, came the sea’s murmur, bringing a suggestion of infinitude. In that clear air, under those heedless stars, human life seemed dwarfed to a minor mystery; it only, of all natural things, stumbled, grovelled, nursed illusions, groped in darkness, laughed and wept. The greater mystery was in the steadfastness of earth’s bosom children, —or so it seemed for the space of twenty heart-beats. It was the night of the first frost.

“Good-bye, Dorcas. You’ll catch cold if you stay out here. I’ll see Benjy sometime to-day.”

The Yeoman

"Can you sleep now?"

"Sleep? Why, I could lie down at this gate and sleep for hours." He opened the gate for her; she passed through and stood on the other side.

"I think we're learning to know each other, Dorcas. We weren't the sort to jump into intimacy all at once. If I only had Steve's brightness—"

"Dear Steve," said Dorcas.

"Yes, dear Steve. We shall miss him sadly; particularly at Christmas. But when he comes back—"

"There's always the coming back."

"Not quite always," said Ford, softly. He turned, cried "Good-bye" again, and vanished.

Dorcas walked slowly up the path and found the door on the latch. As she entered the parlour Richard raised his head from the table; it had fallen upon his books, but there were no indications that he had been asleep. Dorcas explained to him briefly what had happened on the hill-side.

"Poor Benjy!" he said. "How does Job take it?"

"Very well,—so does Bess."

Dorcas was almost afraid to look at him, lest she should read in his face confirmation of her fears. Yet when she did look there was not even triumph in his expression,—nothing but a haunting weariness, an expectancy that gave him no rest. She noticed how hollow his temples had become under the rapidly greying hair, how his face had fallen

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away. The marks of age had doubled in a few months.

“What time is it?” he asked.

“Half-past three.”

“Was there a good blaze?”

“The whole place is burnt out.”

“Fools build and fire takes the rent. Was it insured?”

“I don’t know.”

“I suppose that dairyman of his got drunk and dropped matches about. I always thought it wouldn’t stand long.”

“Why?” She was watching him closely now.

“Oh, one gets ideas of that kind and they generally come true. I believe one could wish a place to destruction. It’s only like the evil eye.” He leant his head upon his hands, shifted his feet uneasily, looked up, stared at the lamp-flame, and then:

“Doreas, things aren’t going very well with me just now. They’ll improve soon,—no doubt of it,—but it’s been a bad season and I’m a bit short. Do you mind—” He paused. “For God’s sake, sit down,—don’t stand there staring at me like a calf!”

She obeyed him, murmuring, “I’m sorry.”

“Can’t you help me out with it?” he snarled.

“If you mean,—yes, yes, of course; all I have is yours. Take it all, dear father. There’s that two hundred pounds——”

“No, no.” He moistened his lips. “Not that,

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I'm not a beggar. But the red roan, may I sell him? I'll get you a better horse some day."

"Of course," cried Dorcas, gladly. "He's wasted on me."

He thanked her briefly, thrust his books into an iron safe in the wall, and left her to go his nightly rounds. She heard his footsteps echoing along passages, the sound of grating locks and bolts, the rattle of door-handles. The room was chilly and she rubbed her hands together for warmth. She did not fret because the horse was to go; all she had, down to the tiniest trinket, was at her father's service; she was neither afraid nor ashamed of poverty. She would go out into the world with him, work for him, cherish him. If only she was sure that he was innocent! She could not be sure. And yet, if he had had a hand in that night's devilry, it was the demon that possessed him, and not he. Perhaps,—the thought struck momentary light,—he did not even know what he had done.

They parted outside her door with the usual kiss. She understood him too well to express her sympathy in words; against speech he locked his heart.

The red roan was taken into Chesterton and sold, but he passed from Dorcas's ownership into hands not less gentle. For the buyer, who paid eighty guineas for him, sold him the next day to Squire Hamer for a hundred and twenty, and Dolly had her wish. That same day, Ford, cross-questioning his dairyman, learnt that on the evening of the fire he had been drinking at the Ship in Melworthy,

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with Job Flower, up to eight o'clock. When he left Job he admitted that he was a little overcome: "not drunk, but wimblly-wambly like, an' minded to sleep." As to the origin of the fire he could offer no serious conjecture, but he had a curious theory, which he presented to Ford with immense emphasis.

"I've year'd,"—a thick forefinger grated on a horny palm, "I've year'd that new housen do sometimes catch avire more quicker'n wold uns. I rackon 'tis the zame 's wi' a rick put up green—zomeat damp at the heart o'n breeds vire."

The dairy was insured, but Ford made no claim on the insurance company. It was better that no inquiries should be made by an astute and unbiased inspector.

Chapter XVII

The Double Warfare

A GROUP of six sat round a wood fire in the great hall at the Court. The early afternoon was closing down sunlessly into windy darkness; the west had no more colour than the east; the sea ran in green-grey ridges, capped with white, to break on grey rocks that themselves took tone from a grey sky. Now and then a flaw of rain broke seaward and swept hissing up the coombe, leaving Melworthy damp and dejected at its foot. The little place seemed to draw itself together shiveringly. The one street was deserted save for occasional men in sou'westers, who, emerging from their doorways, looked up and down and round about thoughtfully, and then, with singular unanimity, drifted off to the bar-parlour of the Ship.

There was no light in the hall save such as the fire gave and what little filtered through a tall northward-facing window. But the last soon faded, leaving only the glow and flicker of the fire, which served fitfully to illumine faces, pick out little details of dress, and cast huge wavering shadows to dance fantastically from floor to vaulted roof. It was the hour when people talk little and in low voices, when even children grow quiet and draw together to whisper mysterious questions.

Margaret Winstone sat on a low couch with Dorcas on her right; next to Dorcas was Ford.

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Beyond and half facing these three were Dolly and Eustace; Steve lay on a rug near Dolly's feet. In two days Steve and Eustace were to start.

"Well, children," said Margaret, "we shan't all meet together like this for a long time, so make the most of it."

"We are making the most of it," said Steve, turning over on to the other elbow. "We're not saying much, but then, who wants to talk?" He had been conveying messages to Dolly by writing with his finger on the rug,—short messages, mainly consisting of single words,—but wonderfully satisfactory to her delighted eyes.

Margaret drew Dorcas's hand into her lap and stroked it softly. She had not married and had sons for nothing; she perfectly understood the electric comedy represented by the young man on the rug and the deeply interested girl who gazed down upon him.

"I hate partings of any kind," said Eustace, who could think of no plausible strategy by which to induce Ford to change seats with him.

"You 'll very soon get over the parting," said Margaret; "after all, it 's nothing in this case. Whatever you do don't get morbid over such trifles, or you 'll not be able to face serious things when they come along."

"There 's the little mother preaching again," laughed Steve. He wrote on the rug, for Dolly's benefit, "Darling," with a very fine flourish to the "D." She stooped and whispered to him—

The Yeoman

" You needn't fill it all in,—the first letter will be enough."

" The little mother's the best preacher I ever heard," Ford said. He leant forward in his favourite attitude, with joined finger-tips. This gave Eustace a clear sight of Dorcas.

" What do you think, my dear?" asked Margaret, pressing Dorcas's hand.

" I'm sure you're always quite right," said Dorcas.

" So she is," said Steve; " if anybody said she wasn't—" He wrote " M. L." in capitals with his forefinger. Dolly nodded.

" You see, Eustace, my boys believe in me. If they didn't, well, I should think it was my own fault."

" Everybody must please understand," said Steve, " that we're quite perfect boys. We never did anything wrong, like other children, we never shall do anything wrong. As a matter of fact, we've spoilt our mother."

" As for you, Steve," said Margaret, " I believe there never was a naughtier child."

" Do you believe that?" he murmured to Dolly.

" I'm perfectly sure," she said, addressing Margaret, " that you must have found him a terrible responsibility."

Margaret laughed and cast back her memory to his toddling days. Why do mothers always revert to them? And does any mother ever quite realise that the child in her child may die?

The Yeoman

"There was never much vice in Steve," Ford said, "I'll say that for him, and he always took a whacking pleasantly. He rather respected me because I was eight years his senior; that showed a nice point in his character."

"They never quarrelled," said Margaret.

The brothers smiled, looked at each other, and went off into roars of laughter.

"My dear mother," said Ford, "we were always quarrelling, and we sometimes had stand up fights; but we didn't tell you. There'd be something wrong about brothers who didn't quarrel."

"I can't see that," said Margaret, "indeed I can't."

"Eustace and I sometimes quarrel, even now," said Dolly. She dropped her handkerchief, and, in stooping to pick it up, stroked Steve's hair.

"A sister's terribly aggravating," Eustace said. "But Dolly's improved lately. She used to be the most self-willed girl you can imagine, and she always got her own way."

"No doubt her way was always right," said Steve.

"You don't happen to be her brother," said Eustace.

"It's a privilege you should be proud of."

"Steve, do be quiet," Dolly whispered.

"You may be sure he is proud of it," said Margaret, "If he wasn't he'd be a young barbarian. . . . Children, just listen to the wind. There'll be a storm to-night."

The Yeoman

The wind was, indeed, rising rapidly. It shrilled and moaned and whimpered about the house, now pleading for admission, now demanding it, now dropping into momentary indifference. For each one of the group, no doubt, it had some special meaning, lending itself to varying interpretations as readily as music. It has been said that the sound of storm searches the heart, and that actual contact with it numbs acute thought,—in the main a true saying, though sometimes subject to complete reversal. The group about the fire fell into silence. When Ford said: “The seaward windows will be crusted with salt to-morrow,” no one answered, though five heads nodded assent. A moment later he rose and moved away to pace up and down under the now lightless window,—a shadow moving in shadow, though to himself substantial, and full of thoughts which insisted that they should be faced and clearly understood.

Eustace slipped into the vacant place beside Dorcas. She drew a little nearer to Mrs. Winstone. Margaret noticed the slight movement and remembered it long after. At the moment she was merely conscious of it as one may be conscious of an accidental hand-touch in a crowd.

Presently Steve got up from his rug and bent over Dolly. “Come up into the music gallery,” he said. They crossed to a narrow staircase on the west side of the hall and mounted it. The sputter of a striking match sounded, a soft glow of candle-light shone out, and then, after an interval uncom-

The Yeoman

monly satisfactory to the occupants of the gallery, came the first low notes of an organ. Steve had developed into a model bellows-blower.

"You like music?" Margaret asked Dorcas.

"Oh, yes," she answered. Eustace propped an elbow on his knee and shaded his eyes with his hand. He would have preferred to be without the music, but since it was there, surging and rippling about him in flowing and leaping waves, why, he must let it carry him whither it would, and if out to sea, beyond all depth, well, that was better than beating about in the shallows within sight of a safety he did not covet.

Music had had small part in Dorcas's life. She had early discovered at her boarding-school that she possessed no promise of executive skill, and had accordingly given up mangling what she loved. It was a decision which amazed her school-mates, although the master had sufficient respect for his art to applaud her choice. "If only these others," he said, with a comprehensive shrug, "would recognise that music isn't only a matter of rattling keys! Half my living would go, certainly, but I should no longer feel that I'm a curse to my time." He was an honest man, but poor, and with a family. He continued to teach the young ladies.

Dorcas listened to Dolly's playing with rare delight. The girl was not a great performer, but she had intuition and sympathy and a point of view which served her well, particularly in circumstances which made such a personal and direct

The Yeoman

appeal. The effect on Dorcas was to make her forget the difficulties which beset her and to carry her into an atmosphere not impersonal, indeed, but where action paused in pleasure, where she might behold the best of herself in full sunlight and see a vision realised. It was a relaxation she might permit herself without losing hold of prickly facts. On Eustace the effect was different; he was swept away from that galling bondage of facts into a world where obligations thinned to gossamer. He turned to Dorcas and said, speaking softly:

"I didn't expect to see you here to-day." Nor had she expected to see him; it was an unfortunate accident. "I'm glad," he continued, "because it gives me a chance to say good-bye." She had no answer ready; a painful consciousness of his eager eyes prompted her to silence.

"I'm going," he said, "against my will. Perhaps——"

The music closed on a quiet chord, and his sentence remained unfinished. With the silence there rushed back upon him the sense of duty to Father Cathcart. He could not blind himself to the fact that Cathcart had nobly trusted him; he almost resented that trust as throwing on himself a personal responsibility which he conceived to be cruelly heavy. There was no one to fight save himself, and that silent, unwitnessed struggle is ever the bitterest of all. Cathcart knew that well; he had chosen his means according to the best light

The Yeoman

that was in him and then hopefully stood aside. Eustace's chin dropped into his hands again.

But he was to have another opportunity of speaking. When Dolly and Steve came down from the gallery Dorcas rose to go. Eustace stood by her.

"We can walk together," he said; "Dolly and I must be off too."

"She was just saying so," said Steve, "and, although I tell her it 's altogether unreasonable, she insists. I shall go with you."

Dorcas threw an appealing look at Ford, who had rejoined them, but he did not catch it. Since the night of the fire he had seen little of her, and then had been unusually reserved. She feared that he repented his confidences or suspected what she had discovered. Reserve answered reserve. It seemed that the ground once won was lost. So Dorcas was again thrown back upon herself, feeling that life was made up of losing battles. By slow degrees the power of active resistance was being weakened in her; it became more and more passive, a habit rather than an impelling force.

Without, the wind blew steadily through inky darkness, fitfully glinted down upon by stars that shone between parted cloud-edges or gleamed obscurely through sweeping scud. The rain had ceased. Leaves torn from creaking branches whirled chimney high, and were carried in a wild rush to rest knee-deep under some sheltering bank. The roar of the sea made one clamour with the

The Yeoman

shouting wind. It was a night to make the timorous hug the fireside and think of foundering ships.

But these four had no fear; to pit themselves against the straining wind was to be gloriously conscious of their strength. Dolly and Steve, leading the way, now and then shouted a word to one another which the wind caught, and carried far behind them. Love confidences were impossible; but they struggled on hand in hand, which was something, while the storm gave them that sense of happy isolation which narrows down the world to two.

Eustace fumed because his last opportunity made sport of him; the knowledge that he was very near to breaking faith with Cathcart rendered his enforced silence all the more galling. To be conscious of the will to act, and to be baffled by preposterous accidental circumstance, is one of the sharpest stings of fate. Nor could he altogether escape the sardonic suggestion of a situation which revealed him to himself in the light of a prisoner on parole anxious to explain to the fair enemy that it was for her sake he occupied that invidious position. He heard no lightening and exhilarating laughter in the wind; it was one of the limitations of his nature to be incapable of the wide view which both comforts and condemns.

Dorcas shouldered against the wind beside him without any wish to hear a word. She kept at a pace's distance from him, thinking jerkily of small matters which, in the lump, went to the building of

The Yeoman

a mental prison-house. She could not see the end, but one forward milestone was clear enough; it stood for her father's ruin. Beyond that, all was mist and gloom. For herself she had no fear; indeed, she was prepared to welcome any change which should release her from a position which was beset with situations almost unendurable. Her fear was all for him. To leave Melworthy would be an uprooting too violent for him to win through; he was too set for transplanting. To remain there, a servant instead of master, would be a humiliation to bring him to the dust. A thought burned in her for an instant, flame-bright, seductively alluring—could she save him? Her heart leapt, paused, and seemed to gather all the blood in her body to itself.

Once, as they toiled on together, she was conscious that Eustace made a movement towards her with a hand outstretched. It touched hers as she drew away. His fingers dropped to his side tingling.

Could she save him? It was impossible. He would not accept—no, it was impossible. Yet the thought recurred, each time with a flashing poignancy which had an effect as of sudden lightning on eyeballs staring into darkness. She shrank into herself shiveringly. To save him,—but he would not be saved. Again the leaping heart tightened her throat.

“Dorcas!” They were within a few yards of her own gate. Eustace had paused under the lee of

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a strip of beech-wood; the wind roared in the branches tumultuously. Below was a space quiet save for the pulsation of the outer storm. He repeated her name.

She said good-bye and turned to cross the road.

“Not like that!”

The pleading in his voice brought her round to face him. There was in it a note of such uncontrolled pain that for very pity’s sake the woman in her was stirred to speak.

“Don’t,” she began. “Why, it’s nothing,—only good-bye—”

She failed on the last word; her head dropped. She felt weakness swooping down upon her, the hardly-to-be-withstood commiseration which could best find expression in tenderness of touch and voice. She looked up to see shadowy arms thrust forward to embrace her, and to hear her name called once more. At that she fled.

She had hardly passed the gate when a hand was on her shoulder. “I was out looking for you.” It was Richard’s voice.

“Were you anxious about me?” She could not control her breath.

“Oh, I wondered where you’d got to. . . . Who was that with you over there?”

“Mr. Hamer.” She did not hesitate over the name. She never lied.

“The boy?”

“Yes,—Eustace.”

“What were you doing with him?”

The Yeoman

"He saw me home from cousin David's."

"So you've been there! I forbid you to go near that house."

"I go as little as I can," she said, her face burning. "I only went this afternoon to say good-bye to Steve."

"What's his going to do with you? Good-byes or no good-byes, you'll stay away from there."

By this time they were in the lighted parlour. Richard moved towards his chair.

"Father!"

He paused and turned slowly. "Well," he said.

"I want to say,"—she hesitated, though there was no uncertainty in her look and bearing; even he could see that she was roused at last,—"I want to say that I can't obey you. I'll promise to see as little as I can of them, but I won't promise never to go near their house. They are the only friends I have."

For a moment he lowered at her out of stormy eyes. His hand rose as though to strike. She took a step forward in readiness to meet the blow if he chose that it should fall. There was no wavering in her look. He felt that they were matched, will to will: he was only her superior in strength of body. His arm sank to his side.

"You won't obey me?"

"I cannot," she answered. He started again towards his chair, paused, and turned once more.

"I give you another chance," he said.

"I cannot," she repeated; at which he cried out

The Yeoman

on her to leave him, adding, with an oath, that to breed daughters was to breed sorrow.

She went to her room wearily, but in no wise weakened in her purposes; indeed, there was a marked sense of relief in knowing that at last she had made a stand. It had been inevitable for months, even from the first, though she might have wished the cleavage between them, if cleavage it was to be, to have come at another time and in circumstances when she was in a position better to support her part. It had required all her strength not to falter. But now that the scene was over it receded strangely from her memory, and its place was occupied by the earlier episode. The beseeching arms from which she had fled haunted her. She could not but be assured that in them she would at least have found some solace, some substance of life's joy, if it were only the solace of an unrest shared with another. Yet she did not repent her flight. There was no longer any doubt that it was because of her Eustace was going away, and going, as he had said, unwillingly. The knowledge humbled her, and drew her to him in a closer intimacy than had existed before. If he had such love for her as Ford had had for that other,—there she met a check that tossed her into chaos. She buried her face in the pillows and lay still.

So she lay as the night hours dragged on, now dozing, now starting wide awake to hear the wind swithering past her window or to catch the slow

The Yeoman

striking of the kitchen clock. She did not know that after long and baffled thought below Richard had stolen to her chamber door, half in sorrow, half in bitter anger and disappointment, to listen for her crying. But she did not weep. His mind was full of doubt and suspicion and awakened tenderness which he strove in vain to crush, and for a time these things drove out his great obsession. But soon it returned in full flood, overwhelming his reason, taking possession of him as with devilish malice. The land was going from him, but he swore to himself to defend it with his life. No stranger should cross his threshold to take possession while breath was in him,—he swore it on his knees.

Chapter XVIII

The Season of Carols

DORCAS met neither Eustace nor Steve again before they set out. They were to go direct to Florence. She would have ventured to see the last of Steve if she could have avoided meeting Eustace, but that was impossible. At the hour of their departure she went up on to the downs alone.

There had been a slight frost in the night; the rime, melting on the grass, had hung the blades with glittering drops. A pale blue sky overarched a sea streaked with grey and blue and delicate lines of green. Inland a slight ground-mist was being slowly drawn upward and dispersed by the strengthening sun. Distance beyond distance opened out until the whole familiar scene lay before her as she had known it since she had grown to the power of loving what tradition and birth had sown in her blood. Melworthy, and all within sight of it, was magic ground to her. There were times when she could hardly look abroad on it without tears.

She reached the highest point on the downs in time to see a carriage containing four persons set out along the bye-way which joins the main Chesterton road at a point two miles above the coombe head. One of the occupants of the carriage looked back. It was Eustace. As she stood there clear against the sky-line he could not fail to see her; she had not considered that possibility.

The Yeoman

Yet she did not move, but watched until the carriage swept out of sight.

After that morning the days wore on to Christmas sullenly and without incident. Richard made no reference to their quarrel; he left her to go her own way. But she was conscious that he watched her closely, and she could not escape from the feeling that he was piling up a black record against her. To what end she could not conjecture,—indeed, she did not trouble to conjecture. In that atmosphere her only hope of peace lay in going the daily round with perfect steadiness, doing her work with the minutest care, and giving no cause for offence. Between the time of Steve's going and Christmas she went only once to David's house, and then openly. Ford she saw more frequently, sometimes in Flower's cottage, sometimes in Melworthy or Chesterton. Benjy was recovering from his hurt. The old relations between Job and his wife appeared to have been renewed, though Dorcas detected, under their apparent aloofness from each other, a current of sympathy which hardly dared to show itself. They were as shy with each other as blundering boy and girl.

Job's manner towards Dorcas, too, had changed; of that there was no doubt. He began to treat her as he had done before her mother's death, deferring to her opinion, volunteering information, speaking of her to Bess as the "little maid." He still worked for Richard with the old persistency, never sparing himself, but he spoke less of his

The Yeoman

master's enemies. Indeed, when Richard came to talk with him he masked himself in silence; he became once more the mere servant. And Richard noted this, and put his own mark upon it, and became himself mere master again.

Christmas at the farm was dreary and without rejoicing; it had never been a merry season there, but that year it was leaden. There were times, of course, when Dorcas escaped from her surroundings and flew wide into an imaginary world which was real enough to set eyes and heart dancing. Such youth as hers could not wholly be kept chained; when she rose to these flights of freedom she experienced a bird's rapture. On a day of one of these moods Ford met her in Chesterton and drove her home; her spirits astonished him; here was a new Dorcas, brimming with life, laughing, buoyant,—a blaze of spring in frost. He watched her flushed cheeks, the lips a-quiver with smiles, the eager eyes alive to every word answering his own, with a new appreciation of her. She was a piece of life rejoicing in itself. His spirits took colour from hers; they flashed together; he was subdued. The reaction he did not see.

When the carol-singers came about she felt that of all sad things carols were the saddest. She lay in bed with memory plucking at her wofully. The untrained voices, the single fiddle played by chilly fingers, the faltering flute,—they made her a child again. A bulging stocking hung at the foot of her bed; she crept softly over the coverlid to feel its

The Yeoman

suggestive protuberances; surely the long-coveted tiny watch was there, but for worlds she would not make sure before daylight. . . .

I saw three ships come sailing by,
Sailing by, sailing by,
I saw three ships come sailing by
On Christmas day in the morning.

She sat up and listened for a moment, then lay down shiveringly and drew the bedclothes about her throat. The thought of ships somehow brought Eustace and Steve into her mind. She had seen Eustace's yacht laid up for the winter. Where were they? She had heard from Ford of their arrival at Florence, but it was likely that they would go elsewhere for Christmas. Italy! it was a word of mystery and romance. To know that they were there seemed to bring it nearer to her.

The voices and the fiddle and the flute went drearily on; she could see the gleam of lanterns through the window blinds; on the ceiling a faint glimmer shone. Then feet shuffled on the gravel, the light disappeared, the gate clicked; they were gone.

On Christmas morning she went to church alone. David and Margaret were there with Ford. After the service she found them waiting in the road.

"We heard from Steve this morning," Margaret said; "they're in Rome."

"Cathcart's doing, no doubt," said David.

The Yeoman

"Steve sent a great box of presents; there was this for you."

Dorcas took a little parcel from her hand. She blushed, holding it awkwardly in her gloved fingers.

"Steve's too kind," she said, "he remembers everybody. I wanted to write to him, but— Will you give me his address?"

Ford wrote it down for her on the outside of the parcel.

"Are they enjoying themselves?" she asked.

"Steve is. He doesn't say much about Eustace, but I dare say he is as well."

"I think Dorcas might have the letter to read," David said. "Perhaps she could bring it back to us to-night."

"Yes," said Ford.

"Not to-night," she said. "I must be at home to-night, but perhaps to-morrow—"

"Well, well, that will do. Or if you can't come then, send it. Madge will want to put it with her treasures."

Margaret handed the letter to Dorcas and they parted.

Dorcas walked home briskly. There had been a slight fall of snow during the night; the bold curves of the downs glittered under a clearing sky; the shadowed side of the coombe had the blueness of deep water. Melworthy's Christmas chimneys sent their smoke into the still air to greet the returning church-goers; the Cove was deserted; a few bold

The Yeoman

gulls were investigating the interiors of beached boats. Half a mile from shore a single ship sailed slowly, seeming to move on air between sky and sea.

Dorcas carried her packet to her bed-room and there opened it with trembling fingers; she was annoyed at her own childish discomposure. Within were two smaller packages; the first contained a wrought-silver belt-buckle, the second a little gold seal. Round the latter was folded a slip of paper, on which was written "From Eustace." The seal was engraved with the device of a dove flying low over waves.

She held it in the palm of her hand, gazing at it mistily, wondering, not, indeed, what it was intended to convey, but why she could not be permitted to escape from that influence which so persistently pursued her. Could she ever make Eustace understand that her love, the inner heart of her, was not for him? She felt sure it was not for him.

She laid the seal aside and read Steve's letter. It was a glowing account of their experiences, full of fresh enthusiasm and delight. "This Italy," he wrote, "is marvellous. It 's not only what one sees, it 's what 's in the air. It 's like living two lives at once." Towards the end: "Eustace still mopes a bit; I call him *Romeo*, though he doesn't talk about any *Juliet*. Perhaps it would be better if he did. Cathcart is splendid; I like him more and more. I don't think poor old Eustace quite

The Yeoman

appreciates him. He seems to think,—but I hate this gossip——”

Dorcas folded the letter and returned it to the envelope. She was thinking of Eustace's words, “I'm going against my will.” It was all quite plain in meaning, but what a tangle in fact! She took up the seal again and pressed it hard against her flesh, watching the pink impression fade slowly. Suddenly she remembered that it was Christmas Day,—probably the last she would ever spend at the farm. Nothing, she felt, could save them, unless . . . Her father's step and voice below brought her to her feet. She put the trinkets away, slipped the letter into her pocket, and went downstairs.

Richard was top-coated and drawing on his driving gloves as she entered the parlour.

“Are you going out, father?”

“Yes,” he answered, without looking at her.

“Before dinner?”

“Yes. I'm going to dine in Chesterton.”

Job drove up to the gate with the trap.

“On Christmas Day?”

“What does the day matter?” He added, more softly, “It's a case of—business.”

“I'm sorry,” Dorcas said. She was bewildered by his unexpected desertion at such a time.

“I can't take you with me, or I would. Besides, it wouldn't do to leave the house. You won't be lonely?”

“I'm used to that,” she answered.

The Yeoman

"Why must you always be throwing it in my teeth that I can't keep a pack of servants about the place? You can go to your friends, I go to mine. That's fair!"

"I want no servants," she said, "I'm quite contented only to have you. Father, stay with me to-day. I'm afraid I shall be lonely, after all."

"I can't," he said. "I can't."

She drew near him and hung upon his shoulder. "Stay!" she pleaded.

"I tell you I can't stay."

She still clung to him, impelled to a course so unusual, so little likely to influence him, by an unaccountable fear of the lonely house. She expected him to push her away, not brutally, but as a protest against her weakness. He did not, however. Instead, she felt his figure set, a heavy sigh broke from him, he eyed her sideways curiously and then put her gently from him.

"It's too late," he said.

"What's too late?"

He muttered something to himself that she could not catch and moved towards the door. There he turned to say:

"I trusted you. When you turned against me——"

"I never turned against you." She added, with a shiver, "You turned against yourself." She saw the blaze of the fire again. He waved an impatient hand and swung through the doorway, saying over his shoulder:

The Yeoman

"My word to you is, take care! If you weren't my girl——"

He cast his arms towards the snowy landscape.
"You'd turn me out?"

"It's been done before," he answered. She felt, for a moment, that to be so turned away would be the best of fortune, an' open door to freedom. But the sight of the grey head held her silent. Whatever wild thoughts he might have of her she felt that she stood between him and unimaginable disaster. She felt no personal bitterness against him; she understood that she was dealing less with a man than with an idea; yet how the soul and body suffered under the tyranny, how it delighted to torture and crush the best out of him, leaving no channel for tender consolation.

She watched him mount into the trap, take the reins from Job, and drive away. Then she closed the door and turned to face her solitary Christmasing.

Chapter XIX

Christmas Day

IT had been a custom at the farm for Job Flower and his wife to dine at Richard's table on Christmas Day. It was then that Bess appeared in the glory of her black silk gown. On each occasion it was slightly altered, so as to approach, as nearly as possible, the current Chesterton fashion. In that gown Job always tolerated his wife; it may be supposed that he felt some degree of pride in her, remembering what she had been in the days when she made the most of her comeliness. But this Christmas the old custom was not regarded. Richard had decided that they should dine alone.

There was no one in the house save Lizzie, and Dorcas rather feared her chatter. Yet she could not sit down solitary, so when the meal was ready she bade the girl eat with her.

"Your master," she said, "has had to go to Chesterton on business, so we must manage without him."

Lizzie was shy at first, but soon she found her tongue and talked volubly. This would be something to tell Amos, that he had dined friendly like with her young mistress, and never a "do that" or a "do this" the whole time. Amos had at last asked her to name the day. That constituted his proposal.

"You zee, miss," Lizzie explained, "I meäde un

The Yeoman

jalous. There wer Ted Izzard favoured me so well's he, and I walked out wi' Ted woone night."

"Yes," said Dorcas.

"That vetch'd un up sharp. He wer vor vightin' Ted. 'Ted's done noo wrong,' I said, 'he 's so much right to me as you. Can 'ee expect a maid to keep on an' on wi'out a change?' 'Change,' 'er says, 'Daz me, that 's pretty cool.' An' arter that he twold me to neäme the day."

"When is it to be?"

"May," said Lizzie, "May 's the marr'n month, vor sure."

"I shall miss you, Lizzie."

"If you'm minded, miss, I'll bide on another year."

"What would Amos say to that?" Dorcas asked, smiling.

"He kep' me waitin' long 'nough," said Lizzie, tossing her head.

"No, no, you shall marry in May, Lizzie. Amos might change his mind."

"Let un," said Lizzie, with perfect unconcern.

"But don't you care for him?"

"Not more'n vor Ted Izzard."

"Do you mean," asked Dorcas, "that you'd as soon marry Ted as Amos?"

"Vor sure I 'ould."

That was an impartial attitude which amazed Dorcas, though she perceived it to be one highly convenient in a world where fixity of choice often goes unrewarded.

The Yeoman

" You shouldn't talk like that, Lizzie, it isn't right."

Lizzie opened her blue eyes in unaffected surprise.

" A man 's a man," she said, " so long 's he 's straight." It was a bare proposition, and for such as Lizzie not a bad working maxim. Yet it made Dorcas feel cold; she looked at the girl with something like dismay. Marriage, to Lizzie, was no more a matter of sentiment than it was to Amos; it was a convenient arrangement recognised by law.

When the dinner things were cleared away Lizzie went out to comfort the captured Amos; Dorcas saw him stolidly waiting beyond the gate of the stable-yard, now whistling to himself, now executing a double shuffle to keep his feet warm. Lizzie would not return till night.

Dorcas threw a log upon the fire and drew her chair close up to it, resting her feet on the fender and her chin on her locked hands. The loneliness of the house, the utter silence, weighed heavily upon her. It seemed that she was banished from the kindness and consolation of that season of the miraculous birth. Her eyes brimmed with tears. She saw in fancy an England of united homes, of wrongs forgiven, of bitterness forgotten, of grief assuaged. It was a picture true enough to make her desolate. She thought round and round the narrow circle of her confinement until her brain ached wearily. She might escape, but at what cost

The Yeoman

in humiliation and agony to herself and others. Yet she could not disburden herself of life and the joy of it; even in that hour of darkness and distrust there came gleams of morning, flying splendours, stirrings of sense and spirit, which were as messengers to proclaim the sacredness of hope. Messengers, indeed, but from what camp? There was only one living soul to whom, in extremity, she could go with naked heart, and that one was Margaret. But Margaret was Ford's mother.

The early dusk set in with increased cold. She had not heard a footstep since Lizzie had gone away with Amos. She found it possible to envy Lizzie; she, at least, went her own way, and with perfect lightness of heart accepted the world's chances; nay, she did more, she took it into her hands to play stakes for herself. At that moment Lizzie was queening it amongst Amos's people, who thought him a fool for his pains; and Lizzie knew perfectly well that when the wedding day was over they would not scruple to tell her the same thing to her face.

Dorcas muffled herself in a shawl and went to the door. The shivering fields glimmered ghostly on and on into twilight, set here and there with trees that looked impalpable as shadows. She walked along the path to the gate and turned to look back at the house. Already it suggested impending decay. The painting of the woodwork had been neglected and a chimney that had tilted in the gale still pointed awry. The upper windows

The Yeoman

were dull as slates from condensed moisture. The hard earth of the garden beds looked dead as bones, the rose-bushes sapless, and ready for the burning. All was colourless, cold, and inert.

She returned to the house and ran upstairs to bring down the buckle and the seal. Then, by the fire-light, she re-read Steve's letter. There was nothing in that to help her,—nothing. She lighted the lamp, took out writing materials, and sat down to the table. She was not accustomed to letter-writing. The crossed confidences which had passed between her and her inseparable school friend had long since ceased; the friend had married. To men, apart from her father, Dorcas had not written half a dozen letters in her life. But she had no difficulty in addressing Steve; she told him little trifling matters about Melworthy and herself, and how she had seen Dolly and talked with her and noted her waiting happiness, and how she thanked him a thousand times for remembering her. That done, she laid the letter aside and drew a fresh sheet towards her.

In all the silent house there were no sounds save the slow ticking of the kitchen clock and the stir of ashes on the hearth. She shut the light away from her eyes; immediately, in place of the warm room, she saw the snowy desolation of the fields. She dipped her pen and wrote "Come to me;" then sat staring at the words. If she sent that message would Eustace fly to her? She was assured that he would. And then? Her head dropped into her

The Yeoman

hands and she was once more witness of his last mute appeal to her. She could not forget that appeal; it had revealed her power to herself and cut deep into her pity. She looked again at the three words she had written; if they were sent they would be irrevocable, and she no longer the mistress even of herself. Suddenly she snatched the paper up, tore it across and across, and threw it on the fire.

A few minutes later she heard the sound of heavy muffled footsteps without, and a knock came to the door. She opened it to admit Job Flower.

"I thought," he said, apologetically, "that if meäster hadn' a come back you mid veel lwonesome and scary like, so I stepped round to zee."

Dorcas set a chair for him. "It was real kind of you to think of it, Job," she said.

He sat on the edge of the chair, leaning forward, turning his hat round and round in his hands, and looking at his snowy boots.

"'Tis main cwold," he said. "I look to zee a week o' vrost."

"How's Benjy to-night?" Dorcas had been in to see him early that morning.

"'Er's vine an' well, miss, bettern' I've ever knowed un. The arm do grow mwore lissom every day, an'," he dropped his voice, "'er do get mwore sense, too; 'er zays 'mother' and 'vather' quite plain. The hurt did un a zight o' good; waked un up like."

The Yeoman

"That's good news, Job. I thought he was brighter, and I've been teaching him a word or two, but I wouldn't speak of it to you or Bess for fear it was only my fancy."

"'Tis God's truth," said Job. "I left un lookin' in a book vull o' girt pictures. 'Twere gied to un by Mr. Ford."

"Isn't Mr. Ford kinder than you thought him, Job?"

He drew his hand across his face and brought the open palm smartly down on his knee.

"I tried to hate un, but there, I couldn'. 'Twere my part to hate un zeäme's meäster did. . . . But 'er wer tarr'ble good to the little chap."

"Father doesn't know him," Dorcas said, "and I'm afraid now he never will. The night of the fire he wouldn't go to help."

"Miss Dorcas,—" Job looked at her keenly—"I did Mr. Ford a wrong." His eyes were on the ground again. "What 'twas doän't matter; 'tis between me and him. Zomeday I'll put it right,—I zee it plain avore me,—there'll be a chance to put it right." He said this with so solemn a conviction that Dorcas felt the reparation was already made. She asked him no questions, nor did he then or at any other time tell her of his share in the doings of that November night. It was clear that he had changed, that the better part of him had been roused to wholesome life by Ford's simple kindness. There was nothing strange in that. He was a man infinitely simple, still perfectly loyal to his

The Yeoman

master, but also, in his newly awakened stumbling way, trying to be loyal to himself. It was easy for Dorcas to forgive him. If he alone had been concerned there would not have been that terror at her heart lest he should go on and turn her suspicion into certainty. But Job said no more; he had eased his mind. He was not troubled by the fancy that she might know as much as he knew himself. He did not care whether she knew or not.

After a time he said:

“Did meäster zay where 'er 'wer gwine?”

“Only to Chesterton,—on business.”

“'Tis a queer day vor business, sure.”

“Yes,” said Dorcas. She took up her pen again and began to write.

“I've a notion 'er'll be whoäm leäte.” Job looked at Dorcas steadily; there was a kind of bewildered pity in his eyes. She wrote on. His hand travelled slowly across his face.

“You allus was a won'rvull woone wi' the pen,” he said. “I mind when missus showed me a letter you'd a zent vrom school, all so clean an' neat 's a printed book. You wer a smart little maid, aye, an' a rare woone to be 'bout the yields.”

“We had many a tramp together, Job.”

“Aye, vor sure we did.” He mused on the recollection.

Dorcas finished her letter and put it into an envelope, hesitated, took it out again, folded it into a three-cornered note, wrote Eustace's name upon it, and enclosed it with her letter to Steve.

The Yeoman

"Meäster didn' zay wher 'er looked to dine?"
Job asked.

"No, he only spoke of Chesterton."

"I think 'er fancied to teäke a bit wi' Miller Glanville."

"But didn't they quarrel about some corn?"

"That's meäde up," said Job. "Didn' Miss Glanville come 'long last week all vriendly like?"

"Of course," said Dorcas, "I'd forgotten that."

"A vine strong 'ooman, tarr'ble vine an' strong," said Job, meditatively. Dorcas did not appear to hear him. She got up and brought wine and glasses from the sideboard.

"Job," she cried, "I've let you sit there all this time without anything to drink, and it's Christmas Day!"

"Why, so 'tis!" he said. She filled for him and for herself. He rose and lifted his glass.

"To the Winstones," he said, "all o' the neäme." She thanked him with a smile. "An' to the wold varm o' Melworthy, every stick an' stwone, an' may there be no changes." He spoke the last words very impressively, looking hard at Dorcas. She thought she understood; she thought he intended to refer to the forlorn condition of Richard's affairs.

"Job," she said, "all may come right yet. And if changes must come, Job, why, we'll meet them as bravely as we can. You'll stand by us, old friend?"

"Aye, so long's life 's in me, so help me God!
. . . . There's nothen vor me to do away

The Yeoman

vrom the wold neäme. I be wold timber. I bide by meäster an' the little maid."

They were silent for a time, both too moved to speak. Then Dorcas said:

"Job, I'm glad we're friends again, you and I."
"Doän't!" the old man cried. "I hurt 'ee, there, I know I hurt 'ee, but I thought meäster wer right. 'Tidn't his fault, he 's bitter drove. There 's a devil in un that tears and tears."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Dorcas. "He doesn't even trust me now."

Job shook his head despondently. He began to fancy that Richard no longer trusted him.

Chapter XX

The Doctor

WITH the beginning of the new year Dorcas experienced a little of the delusive satisfaction of the fresh start. It was a satisfaction, however, which died with the first week and a growing familiarity with the changed date. Yet it was something, if only to mark the definite promise of spring. She associated with that season, as young blood always will, miraculous possibilities altogether apart from the mere changing season, recognising in it a pervasive divinity whose power at any time may overstep the natural order and blossom into occult benefactions. She began, in effect, to live somewhat more in the future, forgetting, perhaps deliberately forgetting, that the future has its source in the past as palpably as the fruit in the seed. She had some days so restful, so removed from the fears which had overshadowed her, that there were moments when she could have believed herself to live two separate lives, connected only by the accident of a single body. But these moments passed and were resolved in their own light, leaving, not darkness, but a newer comprehension of the mystery of being, a comprehension safeguarded by instinct, not experience. She was so essentially a woman,—and a woman untinctured with the vice of philosophy,—as to be incapable of making metaphysical deductions. She possessed an imagination

The Yeoman

trained only on certain traditions and the wide horizons of her native soil; she was mistress of a body healthful as the wind across which seabirds slanted with spread pinions. But between sense and imagination surged the current of circumstance,—fierce torrent for the control of human will.

It was not surprising that she was blind to what others saw, or that all Melworthy talked of what did not reach her ears. Yet at last, and so suddenly as to throw her into panic, she realised that Molly Glanville, the robust and masterful daughter of the Chesterton miller, was high in Richard's favour, and that between them there was some understanding which excluded her. A word heard in Chesterton opened her eyes, and she set out on the return walk to Melworthy dazed with new possibilities.

On the outskirts of the town she had to make a call. There Dr. Stanton lived in a house surrounded by a stone wall so high that it completely hid the place from passers by. In this wall was a heavy door, with a bell-pull on one side of it, and under the bell-pull a brass plate bearing the doctor's name. When the bell was rung some mysterious mechanism inside the house was put in motion and the door swung open. To strangers there was something startling in this, but Dorcas was accustomed to it, and she walked up the broad gravelled drive to another door where a servant was waiting. She heard the doctor's voice call "Who is it?" Then his head bobbed up over the

The Yeoman

surgery blind and a moment later he ran out to her himself.

"Come in here, Miss Winstone," he said. "You won't mind, will you? I'm making up medicines,—worked to death. At this time of year everyone makes a point of getting ill. With the poor people it's because they've just paid their club subscriptions and mean to make sure of their money's worth. You aren't ill, are you?" He looked at her sharply.

"No," she answered, "I'm never ill."

"Humph! You shouldn't be, that's certain. I should say you had a constitution about as perfect as mine, and that's something. I need it. May I ask what you do want?"

"Mrs. Voce asked me to call for more of the same medicine."

The doctor sat down and spread his hands on his knees.

"Mrs. Voce," he said, "may go to the deuce before she gets any more medicine from me. The woman's as well as you or I. I assure you she delights in doctor's stuff. Would you believe that she takes double the quantity prescribed out of sheer liking for it? I have to make things equal by reducing the doses. There are people in my district," he said, solemnly, "who look upon the swallowing of drugs as a pleasant diversion. It gives them a kind of distinction. The neighbours come in and sniff at the bottles and sample the pills. The difficulties of a serious case are doubled by neigh-

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bours. I've known them to feed a diphtheritic child with toffee-apples."

He turned again to his bottles, scales and measures, groaning portentously. "If I don't get a dispenser soon," he said, "I shall go mad."

"Can I help you?" asked Dorcas, "I'm not in a hurry."

"My dear young lady, you're an angel." He stood before rows of bottles and jars, and swept a comprehensive hand towards them. "On each of these there's a number. I'll sing out the number and you hand down the bottles, will you? We shall get finished in no time. I had a boy to help me once, but Lord, he worried my life out! It's a mercy I didn't poison people right and left."

For some time they worked together industriously, the doctor weighing and measuring, Dorcas passing down the drugs and filling up the bottles with water from a filter. The mechanical operations were a relief to her; she was not anxious to get back to the farm. Besides, she wanted to hear some confirmation of the report she had heard; there still remained some hope that it was false. Certainly Dr. Stanton would know the ins and outs of any rumour. And the doctor kept an alert eye on Dorcas as well as on his work, and was perfectly aware that something troubled her. But he was not a man to force a confidence; in his profession confidences were so common as to render them a nuisance. Yet he took a particular interest in Dorcas; he had watched her grow up

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with an attention not entirely accounted for by mere professional instinct; he saw in her something more than simply a yeoman's daughter, and he recognised in her circumstances, which were partly known to him and partly acutely conjectured, conditions likely to bear heavily on inexperienced shoulders. Also, he was a susceptible man still, in spite of a general opinion of women in which an irritable scorn was chief ingredient. He used to say that women were great only in facing death, to which greatness they appeared mysteriously to attain by neglecting the intelligent study of life. He could account for the fact in no other way, he said.

When the medicines were made up he wrapped the bottles in paper and handed them to Dorcas,—having previously set pen and ink before her,—telling her the name to be written upon each. One of the names was that of Mr. Hamer. Dorcas wrote it down wonderingly, seeing before her, not the doctor's package, but a three-cornered note.

“Is Mr. Hamer ill?” she asked.

“Should I be sending him medicine if he were well?”

“Of course not; I mean is he seriously ill?”

“I'm not sure that I ought to answer that question,” said the doctor.

“I didn't mean to be inquisitive,” Dorcas said, humbly, and she laid the bottle aside with the others.

“People never do mean to be inquisitive,” said

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Stanton, smiling. "When they ask a question it's always from some other motive."

Dorcas saw the smile and asked: "Don't you ever ask questions?"

"It's my trade to ask them; the difficulty is that half the people I'm called in to see won't answer them properly. They seem to have a notion that it's my business to know by instinct all the follies of themselves and their ancestors." He added: "As for Mr. Hamer, I should say that he was suffering from some worry or other. He's not seriously ill as one generally uses the words, but the mind plays strange tricks with the body, just as the body plays strange tricks with the mind. It's a give and take game with them all through life. Now Hamer has an only son, and I shouldn't wonder,—I shouldn't wonder,—if he were at the bottom of this."

The doctor's eyes were fixed upon Dorcas with an expression of the utmost simplicity and openness.

"But," said Dorcas, "how can that be? Young Mr. Hamer isn't wild, or extravagant, is he?"

"Most young men in his position are a bit of both. I don't blame them, either. Bless my soul, what can you expect? But the old squire wouldn't be worried about a little wildness. No, there must be something else."

The doctor hummed a bar or two of "The Farmer's Boy," and examined a stethoscope critically. Dorcas was afraid to question him further.

The Yeoman

There was something in his manner which gave her the impression that he was on the watch.

Dr. Stanton laid the stethoscope down and turned towards her again. His fingers, never quiet, went into his waistcoat pockets, from which proceeded the sound of metal clicking against metal.

"Don't you feel pretty lonely at the farm?"

"Sometimes," said Dorcas.

"I thought as much. And no doubt your father does, too."

"I'm afraid he does," said Dorcas.

"Don't worry about it, don't worry about it. Why, that's nothing. I'm lonely as well."

"You!" Dorcas cried.

"How can I be anything else? I'm not always flying about the country. Sometimes, in the long evenings, I think I've made a mess of things. Life's such a queer affair that it's easy to miss the best of it. Once on a certain road one goes on and on without looking at the sign-posts."

"I'm sure you've done more good to the poor people than anyone between here and Bristol." Dorcas spoke with enthusiasm.

"Ah!" said the doctor. "That's all very fine, and good hearing in a way, but even if it were true it's nothing to my credit. It's no virtue in a man to follow his inclination; it's generally called a vice. But I never troubled about labels of that kind."

"But you label your medicines," said Dorcas.

"That's because I generally prescribe for fools," said the doctor.

The Yeoman

Dorcas laughed.

"To hear you talk," she said, "one might think you were the hardest man alive——"

"I wish to goodness I were a little harder." After a pause he said, gathering himself together by the aid of a great rattling in the pockets,— "Did it never occur to you that you might escape from that lonely old farm?"

"I don't want to escape."

The doctor chuckled.

"Do you mean to tell me you look forward to a life there with the changes that are coming?"

"Changes?" Dorcas echoed. Then she added, "What changes?" and held her breath.

"Most girls object to step-mothers," said the doctor, "particularly when the step-mothers are youngish. I'm talking frankly, you see; if I'm to talk at all it must be like that. Now you can leave the farm behind just as Mollie Glanville is going to leave the mill behind."

It was true, then. Dorcas's head drooped.

"I'm not exactly a boy," continued Stanton, "and I'm not exactly an old man. I'm tired of only being married to my profession. What do you say to taking pity on me and helping me to make up physic?"

The question found its way slowly to the girl's consciousness. "You mean—" she began.

"I mean," said the doctor, with the utmost cheerfulness, "that I ask you, Dorcas, to take me, John Stanton, Doctor of Medicine and various

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other things, for an unworthy but honest husband."

Here, truly, was a way of escape. For a moment Dorcas saw herself treading that peaceful road, safe in the protection of this candid and upright gentleman. But that way was not for her.

"Doctor!"

He sat looking at her very earnestly, though a smile still lingered about his eyes. He did not speak.

"Doctor, if I only could!"

"What is there to prevent it?" he asked gently.

To that she had no answer ready. But the doctor understood.

"Ah!" he said, "I see how it is. Well, well, I suppose I must finish as I began,—alone. There's no great hardship in that, after all."

"I'm afraid I can't explain it all to you," Dorcas said, hesitatingly.

"You owe me no explanation and I don't ask for any. I made a shot in the dark, and missed. There's no more to be said, is there?"

"Yes," said Dorcas, "there's this. I thank you from my heart, more than I could ever tell you, for your—your——"

"Tut, tut!" Stanton stared at the pile of bottles on the surgery table as though they were quaintnesses he had never seen before. "I should apologise to you, I dare say, instead of you talking to me about thanks. But I'm not going to. No, why should I? What I do apologise for," he added,

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"is for giving you so much trouble over those damned bottles."

He was quite unconscious of the adjective. "If I could only make love potions, Lord! what a business I should do. I've been asked for 'em, too,—seriously asked for 'em. . . . As for Mrs. Voce, tell her that she'll get no more medicine from me. She can make a pother about it if she likes, I dare say she will, but that 's my last word."

The doctor checked a sigh half-way, stretched himself, turned over the leaves of his prescription book, pushed it aside, then rose and looked over the blind.

"Ah," he said, "my trap 's coming round." He looked at his watch. "The fellow 's three minutes late again. He has no more idea of time than my boots. . . . I can give you a lift to Melworthy, Miss Winstone."

"I think I'd rather walk," Dorcas said.

"There you are! Now yesterday you'd have come with me fast enough. It's the way of the world, I suppose, at least of a woman's world. Well, well!"

"I didn't mean it like that, really I didn't."

"No?" said the doctor.

After a pause Dorcas said: "I think I will come with you, if I may."

He stepped over to her and laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"Dorcas, you're a rare one, if I may say so much; a rare one," he repeated.

The Yeoman

"I must see my cousin Margaret," she said, as if she had not heard him.

"Confidences?" he asked.

"Yes," said Dorcas, "but not about what you asked me."

"My dear girl, I didn't take you for a tattler. But if you like to speak to Mrs. Winstone about it, do. For all I care, the whole countryside may know that I did one sensible thing in my life!"

He put on his great-coat and turned up the collar. "Better muffle up well," he said to Dorcas, "it's bitterly cold outside."

He led the horse through the mysterious door in the wall, jumped up beside Dorcas, and took the reins. The hedges slipped by them to the sharp rhythm of the hoofs, the wayside trees blinked frostily in the dusk. Now and then a labourer passed them stolidly, humped under his weight of tools. Beyond the coombe, a misty blackness into which they were descending, the sea still returned some parting rays of sunset,—rays cold as icicles, beautiful with a most inhuman and inhospitable loveliness.

"From out there," said the doctor, pointing with his whip, "from out there comes the weather that kills our old folks hereabouts, and the young, too. I've often noticed that the natives of a place suffer from what does strangers good. It seems a queer thing, but when you come to think about it, it's right enough. For that matter, everything's right enough."

The Yeoman

"Is it?" said Dorcas, with her eyes on the dying gleams.

"I don't like to be taken up like that!" He touched his horse's flank with the lash.

"I didn't mean to take you up," said Dorcas. "I was only wondering."

"And I was trying to comfort myself," said the doctor.

The horse had covered another half mile before he spoke again. Then he said:

"You see, it's like this. When I said that everything was right I meant it was logically right. If you do a silly thing the result's all in accordance with the law of consequences."

"And yet," he added, "a clever person,—a genius or a rascal,—may avoid the consequences." He waved his whip towards the now invisible sea. "I withdraw my statement," he said. "Everything is not right."

Dorcas sat upright in her seat feeling, somehow, that she was passing through a strange country which reminded her of the old. Even her companion was different, yet with him the change was on the side of intimacy, of greater understanding. It was the landscape itself that appeared unfamiliarly familiar. Was it possible that she had been dreaming herself into a condition in which she could not distinguish between imagination and fact? She repeated to herself a few words which convinced her that fancy had no part in her environment.

The Yeoman

"Did you speak?" asked the doctor.

"I didn't mean to," she answered.

"I hope," he said, "that you'll consider me your friend. I'm not going to talk any sentimental twaddle,—that's not in my line. But you and I,—well, I won't say any more about it."

"I believe," said Dorcas, "you're the best friend I have. Only——"

"That's enough for me," he said. He pulled in, jumped to the hard road, and helped Dorcas to alight.

"That's the short cut," he said, pointing to the right. "You know it? Good-bye."

Dorcas listened till the sound of the wheels was lost, and then turned up the path. And the little doctor, speeding down the coombe, said to himself, "A rare one? I should think so! But I was too late. Lord, what creatures they are! That girl,"—he settled his chin into his collar, "that girl's worth all the others in the damned county. If I could only have saved her from the rough times ahead."

It was observed, by some of his patients, that that evening Doctor Stanton was more irritable than usual, by others that he was more indulgent. The doctor was thinking of the bottles directed in an unfamiliar hand, and wondering why fate was so indifferent a manager of the world's business.

Chapter XXI

A New Fear

DORCAS sat in the great hall with Margaret; they were alone together. The elder woman had an arm linked within the younger's, and her fingers from time to time stroked the back of Dorcas's hand.

"Had you heard of it?" Dorcas asked.

"Only yesterday, for the first time. But perhaps it isn't true, after all, my child."

"I'm sure it's true," Dorcas said. "I've felt for a long time that something was coming. I should have seen it long ago."

"That would have done no good," said Margaret, gently. "If your father has made up his mind to marry, he'll marry."

"But why hasn't he spoken to me about it? If it would make him happier I should be glad. But it can't, I know it can't. Cousin Margaret, he doesn't want to marry, he's nearly ruined now."

"I wonder whether Mollie Glanville knows that?"

"He'd never think to speak to her of his affairs."

"But wouldn't her father ask?"

"He might ask, but father wouldn't tell him anything. I believe he thinks," Dorcas lowered her voice, "that nothing can take the land from him. Sometimes I fancy he hardly knows what he's doing."

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Margaret.

The Yeoman

"If it would only make him happier!" Dorcas cried again, "but he's doing it to punish me."

"Try not to think too hardly of him."

"I don't, I don't think hardly of him. . . . Cousin Madge, shall I go to him and say I will never see you or speak to you again?"

Margaret's lips touched the girl's cheek caressingly.

"No," she said, "your life must not be spoiled, my child, and besides, in the end, the sacrifice would do no good. I have spoken to David about it, and to Ford, and they agree with me. We never forget you, Dorcas. You must bear it all a little longer, and then who knows what wonderful thing may happen to change the world for you?"

Dorcas was drawn into Margaret's warm embrace, and rested there quietly, as though the arms about her made a magic circle within which no disquiet could live. And Margaret yearned to the girl with an affection hardly less than that which she lavished upon her own sons, and the wonderful thing which was to happen shone clear before her. The wounds of love, she thought, could only be cured by love, and Ford needed some such divine medicament for his final healing. Let time do its work, that when the ointment was poured forth no drop of its fragrant essence should be lost. She had a profound belief in slowness of growth, distrusting the sudden blossom. To feel Dorcas close against her heart, leaning there in perfect trustfulness, gave her a delight almost as deep as a

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renewed motherhood. She would not speak of what was in her mind, on no account would she speak. When Dorcas drew a little closer it seemed to her the instinct of a child in trouble. She could not know that in the girl's life were other matters of which she had no hint,—cross-currents, deeps and eddies which made purpose waver and the will pliant as a blown flame.

"I couldn't give you up," came from the bowed head. "Even if it were right, I couldn't."

"It wouldn't be right. I've thought all round it, and I know it wouldn't."

"What will happen when the end comes?"

"Your home is always here when you like to come to it. You will be my child."

A slight tremor shook Dorcas. Margaret leant aside to look into her eyes for tears, but the eyes were dry.

"You would be happy with me?" Margaret asked.

"Oh, yes."

"And trouble is soon forgotten."

"All trouble?"

"All but the very greatest, and even that ceases to hurt. Be sure God does not send sorrow to ruin our lives, but to prepare us for something He holds in reserve."

Margaret's faith was born of extreme simplicity and a placid life. Dorcas heard the words as she might have heard a stir of wind in tree-tops out of sight. She, too, had faith, but at that time it

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seemed a mere memory, a gleam impotent for leading.

“ Shall I tell father that I know? ”

“ Yes, I think I should do that, if he doesn’t speak to you.”

“ Cousin Madge! ”

“ Dearie! ”

“ I feel as though other girls would have managed better.”

“ How? Most girls would have left home, but it was right for you to remain.”

“ It has done no good.”

“ You don’t know that.”

“ If I had only been a man! ”

“ That would have been worse. You would have quarrelled and parted long ago.”

“ But a man can fight for himself.”

“ So can a woman,” said Margaret, “ only in a different way. She’s more easily led, certainly, but then she can more easily lead as well.”

“ I tried to lead him, but it was no use.”

“ You did your best.”

“ If I could only think so! ”

“ You must think so.”

“ When mother died I fancied I could make him happy. I know he loved me then. He was never gentle, like you or Cousin David, but that wasn’t his fault; he couldn’t help it. Now he hardly speaks to me at all.”

“ He loves you still,” said Margaret, “ don’t imagine that he doesn’t love you.”

The Yeoman

"He loves the land better than me." She shuddered and cried out, "And he's going to lose the land!"

"Perhaps it may be saved yet," said Margaret, and there was a confident light in her eyes. Dorcas only shook her head. The vision of the lonely, ruined man darkened her spirit. She felt that with a hundred hands outstretched to help him, with hope eager at his side, he would be lonely still, and hopeless. She had an appreciation of his temperament, of his colossal rigidity, of his unreasoning absorption in his single passion, possible only to her. She had lived in the shadow of these things. There was no case for help where pride burnt with so consuming a flame. She knew it in her inner heart as surely as she knew the fact of her own passionate existence, now straining hither and thither in a sea of warring tides. From that personal tumult leapt the cry:

"What am I to do?"

To which came Margaret's quiet answer, "Wait." To such as she waiting was easy, a simple folding of the hands in patient expectation; but to Dorcas the world had come to be a fever, drying the springs of life.

"Isn't waiting cowardly?"

"Not in your case, Dorcas." The girl raised her head from Margaret's breast and looked into her eyes.

"I wish I were more like you," she said.

"It's much better to be just yourself. Some-

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day you'll come to know that being yourself is exactly right. There are beauties even in faults. Would any mother wish to have a child that never did anything wrong? If she had her choice, would she take an angel to nurse, or a little crying, naughty, ordinary boy? Why, she might look at the angel, but she'd take the boy."

"Of course she would," said Dorcas.

"I'm afraid I've been preaching to you!"

"It wasn't like most sermons. You've been telling me that it's a good thing to have faults."

"Have I? I'm not sure that I meant that. Perhaps I got out of my depth."

"I must go now," Dorcas said. She put on the hat and jacket she had thrown aside and stood looking about her hesitatingly, as though trying to secure a picture of the surroundings to carry with her into a scene less bright.

"Did you know that Mr. Hamer was ill?" she asked, bringing her gaze back to the glow of the fire.

"Dolly told me,—she's been here often. She thinks he's fretting because Eustace is away. I advised her to write to him and suggest that he should come home."

"At once?"

"The sooner the better if there's any real need."

"Then Steve will come, too?"

"Yes, they'll keep together."

Dorcas sat down again for a moment, shielding her eyes from the heat with closed fingers.

The Yeoman

"How soon will they be here?"

"Almost at once, if they decide to return. They might be with us to-morrow, even to-night. It would be just like Steve to rush in without warning."

"To-night!" said Dorcas. She repeated the word as if there were some mystery in it. It seemed not so much to indicate a point of time as to represent a lock suddenly opened for the outpouring of great waters, which separated her from Margaret with an instant, acute sense of isolation. If she dared tell her all!

There was a step without and a hand upon the door.

"Steve!" cried Dorcas.

Not Steve, but Ford. He entered from the darkness slowly, with eyelids half lowered to shield his eyes from the sudden light. They opened to the full, became aware of Dorcas, drooped again, and he advanced to lay a hand in hers.

"I thought you were Steve," was all she could say.

"Are we so much alike?" Their hands parted.

"We were talking of Steve just as you came in," said Margaret, "and saying that he might be back to-night."

"Not to-night. I drove to Chesterton to meet the last train on the chance of his coming."

"And never said a word to me, Ford?"

"I wanted to surprise you, little mother."

He sat down in the seat from which Dorcas had

The Yeoman

risen as though he were unconscious of her presence. She kissed Margaret good-night.

"Everything will come right, dearie," Margaret whispered.

"Yes," said Dorcas, with strained lips.

"Are you going?" asked Ford, springing to his feet.

Dorcas said "Yes" again. They moved towards the door, and Margaret watched them with an earnestness that had memory in it. The door swung wide. Their hands met again, and mother and son were alone together.

"Must she go home alone?" asked Margaret.

"It's better that she should. . . . I've been with ghosts this afternoon." He sat down and hid his face.

"My son!"

"Yes, little mother." Her arm was heavy on his shoulder.

"You can't forget, don't try to forget. But," she paused and joined cool fingers across his forehead, "isn't it possible to remember and still—begin again?"

"Mother!" He drew her hands down and held them against his cheek. "Mother, mother!" The repetition of the sacred name was like a new birth-pang to her. She caught him to her heart.

"Ford, an hour ago her head was there!"

"Poor child!" he said.

And Dorcas, walking home through the frosty moonlight, could not escape from the awful loneli-

The Yeoman

ness of the time or of herself. She found herself hurrying and paused to wonder why she hurried,—then started off again to escape the question. There was a mystery in the diffused moonbeams which seemed continually to touch some nascent understanding, only to assure her of her inability to grasp its essential significance. Ford had seen her and greeted her and said good-bye. And then of a sudden she remembered wrapping up bottles and writing a name upon one of them. How long ago was that? Just before her shone a light in the farm parlour, and on the blind was the shadow of a figure bending over books.

Chapter XXII

Friends in Council

FATHER CATHCART had two letters before him; one, addressed to himself, was from Dolly, telling him of her father's indisposition and begging him to consider the advisability of Eustace's return. The other was the girl's letter to her brother, containing the same news.

There was a conflict proceeding in Cathcart's mind. In ordinary circumstances hesitation would have had no place,—the return to Melworthy would have been instant. But he shrank from that course now, believing that it would undo what little good might have been accomplished. He was in doubt even as to that little; sometimes he fancied that this flight had been a mistake, strengthening, rather than loosening, the bonds which he wished to see utterly dissolved. The affection between himself and Eustace still endured, but on the side of the younger man there was a reservation which the other felt acutely. It was like a pervading accusation, always present, yet always unexpressed. It looked from Eustace's eyes, was suggested in his movements. And Cathcart recognised that reason could do nothing; that weapon, in whose use he was a master, fell foiled before human passion. In his experience of life he was forced to the conclusion that reason touched only the minor matters.

The Yeoman

Its clear light shone little in the world of personal interests.

After all, the choice lay with Eustace ; he had no control over him beyond that moral suasion which he had already exerted to its utmost limit. To attempt to exceed that limit would force defiance, the inevitable result of power abused.

He folded the letters and laid them aside. Through the window of their common sitting-room he looked out upon the still waters, the old walls, the universal green shutters of Venice. He had learnt to love the place years before ; it was a point of pilgrimage to him. But now his hold upon it seemed insecure ; it impressed him with a certain sense of impotence. He turned to the thought of England with a glow in his heart, and had a fleeting vision of Melworthy nestling in its coombe under a sky that rained sunlight from western cloud-edges. The Adriatic had no such hold on him as that colder, sterner splendour which signalled home. He went out slowly and found his way to the Church of the Assumption.

At that hour Steve and Eustace were pacing the piazza.

“We must start to-morrow,” Eustace said.

“I’m ready,” said the other. “Good old England! They’ll be lighting up there now.”

It was the time of the deepening English twilight.

Steve had an arm in his friend’s. His grasp tightened.

The Yeoman

"I shall be glad to see Melworthy again," he said.

"Glad!" cried Eustace. "My heart 's been there all the time."

"And mine, too," said Steve.

"Yours?"

"Why not?"

"I thought you were happy here."

"Because I remembered what was over there."

Eustace looked perplexed.

"It isn't so difficult to understand, is it?" asked Steve.

"Everything 's difficult to understand."

"I don't find it so."

The few figures that passed and overtook them seemed remote as shadows.

After a long silence Steve said:

"Why shouldn't I tell you the truth before we finish up this part of our lives? You have a sister, Eustace. She's in England."

His sister had been as far away from Eustace as the clouds that took the reflection of the west above his head. The word brought him back to the stones under his feet, to the commonplace of the ideal translated backwards.

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Didn't we make a compact,—something about secrets?"

"Here's mine, then." And he threw out the name, "Dorcas."

Steve looked at his companion as though the

The Yeoman

word should have wrought instant change in him, like a veil suddenly withdrawn.

"Is that why we're here?" he asked.

"That's why I'm here,—and you, because you're a friend worth having."

Steve's thoughts were busy for a time. The conflicting lights that flashed from them were confusing as crossing searchlights at sea.

"Does she know?" he asked.

"Yes. She, and I, and Cathcart,—and now you."

"Did she want you to go away?"

"God knows!" He began to walk more rapidly, stung by the thought that all he had to tell was of himself in a drama supposed to be consecrated to two.

"You know the kind of thing people say," he continued, "and Cathcart's like the rest in that. I'm the poor brute who has to carry the burdens of his ancestors. They're all heaped on to my back. Cathcart means well, of course."

"No doubt of that," Steve interjected.

"But to mean well isn't to be right, is it?" cried Eustace.

"No, I suppose not."

"It seems to me," said Eustace, "that people should do what they like with their own lives; a man's life is as much his personal property as the clothes he's paid for."

"That won't do." Steve was quite convinced that there was a fallacy in that statement. He

The Yeoman

stumbled on to it crudely. " You see," he said, " clothes aren't alive, and that makes all the difference."

" But in this case?" Eustace asked, with a tremor in his voice which indicated that he understood.

" It's beyond me," Steve answered. " Give me time to think about it. Things seem a bit mixed up."

There was no doubt of that. But Steve had that gift of clear-headedness which is not infrequently confounded with commonplaceness. His conclusion was rapid and complete.

" Look here, old man," he said. " If you're prepared to carry the thing through, I dare say it'll come off all right, but you must be jolly sure of yourself and her. There'll be no end of rows. Dorcas is worth the fight, though,—she's splendid. But then,—hadn't you better let the affair rest for the present? You see, your father's seedy now, and any worry might make him worse."

This simple statement of the case made Eustace groan; it assumed so much, so much that he was afraid to assume. A plain statement of facts from the outside is in the nature of a surgical operation without anaesthetics.

" If only Richard Winstone were a different kind of man!" Steve said.

Eustace saw again the weal across Cathcart's cheek.

" It beats me," he said, " how you can come from the same stock."

The Yeoman

"The connexion isn't very close; and then we were brought up in a different school."

"The man's three parts devil."

"Not quite that, I think," said Steve. "Personally, I'm more sorry for him than anything else. The idea at the back of his head is fine enough in its way. But he's not the sort to fight winning battles."

"You think he'll go under?"

"Yes," said Steve, "I do."

"And then——"

"Then perhaps he'll come to his senses,—though I doubt it."

"What about Dorcas?"

"My dear chap, you must wait."

From this unsatisfactory saying Steve proceeded to his own affairs, which did not much interest Eustace. "Oh, yes," he said; "that was all plain sailing; everything depended on Dolly there,—she'd get her own way anyhow." Besides, his father was fond of Steve and both families were rich. The mention of money always touched Eustace on the raw.

Father Cathcart saw the pair walking in deep consultation, and did not interrupt them. No clear guiding had come to him; for the first time in his life, perhaps, he was forced into a neutral position which was worse than active embarrassment. Yet his inner feeling was for return; the thought of his friend and patron wearying for a sight of his son's face roused all his tenderness. He threw out his

The Yeoman

hands with a gesture that indicated: "Let Eustace decide."

When they came in Cathcart met them with a face entirely free from suggestion. Eustace took it to be a mask. His conscience was sore.

"Well?" Cathcart asked.

"We're both for going back to-morrow," said Eustace.

Cathcart handed him Dolly's letter.

"Very good," he said. "That being settled, let us do some packing to-night."

Later, from the deeps of a trunk in which he was half-buried, Eustace heard a voice.

"Is the cure complete?"

"Not quite, I'm afraid," he answered. Then he brought his head into the light and faced Cathcart confidently.

"To be quite frank," he said, "I don't think it's begun."

"Our trip was a mistake, then?"

"No, I don't say that. It gave me a chance."

"But a missed chance means greater weakness afterwards."

"Do you call it weakness?"

"I do," said Cathcart, steadily. "Any affection which cannot be controlled at the call of higher issues is weakness."

"Would you turn the world into a college of martyrs?"

"There might be worse things than that," Cathcart answered, smiling. "For, after all, martyrdom

The Yeoman

does not mean misery. If it did we should have had few martyrs, believe me."

"Do you consider yourself orthodox?"

"Perfectly."

"The deuce of it is that you fellows presume to dictate in matters of which you've had no experience."

"We're human," said Cathcart.

"Humanity in leading strings!" Eustace regretted his feeble bolt before it was well shot.

"Quite so," said Cathcart. "Take away the leading strings, and what then?"

"God knows!"

"That's just the point. Think over it. Tomorrow, remember, we're for England and Melworthy."

Eustace saw Melworthy as a blot in a windy night.

Chapter XXIII

The Seal

ONE of those wonderful February days, which seem to postdate the spring, drew Dorcas to the Cup. High-travelling clouds swept the reviving earth with rolling shadows; from deep blue rifts light poured as with a sense of joyful oblation. The tame sea murmured to itself, moving with an undulation as gentle as that of a grass-meadow under the breath of the south. The smoke of Melworthy hung above the village in a pearly mist; it thinned and deepened and took new colour like a magical curtain imbued with some subtle wizardry of consciousness. Nature was new-washed, a re-born smiling babe with no memory of pre-existence. The thrushes in the coombe fluted to the screaming gulls.

Eustace and Steve had returned. Dorcas had seen Steve, but they had not had more than a few words together. The meeting was in the presence of others,—Dolly engrossed him. Dorcas was disappointed; not that she had anything particular to say to him, but she had looked forward to a long talk full of the trivial things which go to make up a happy confidence. Still, it had been something to watch his deep contentment, something to see how a short absence had deepened the expression of his love. Once or twice Dorcas thought she caught his eyes on her with a look of enquiry.

The Yeoman

She stood at the Cup's edge, gazing across the sea's glitter, in a kind of tranced suspension of emotion. Physically conscious she was, but mentally subdued to a haze of formless thoughts,—the natural condition of a mind over-wearied by unsolvable matters. It was a condition, at least, which made for ease, for temporary rest, for quietness, even though it were of stagnation. With hands hanging straight, her whole figure rigid as a statue, she might have been taken as an emblem of the women who look seaward for the boat that never comes back.

She heard her name spoken. She stirred, turned, and trembled into full consciousness. Eustace was standing within the circle of the Cup.

“I saw you from below,” he said.

“Yes?” She was hardly mistress of her lips.

“You still come to the old place, Dorcas?”

“Sometimes.”

His eyes widened. The admission was sweet to hear.

“Why did you come back?” she cried. The question was forced from her by a surge of fiery possibilities.

“Why?” He checked the natural answer and named the obvious one. “My father’s ill.” Eustace was learning the value of repression.

Dorcas breathed deeply. “Will he get well now you’re at home?”

“We hope so. He seems better already.”

She turned to the sea once more. Its aspect had

The Yeoman

changed. Or was it sea at all down there, that laving greenness remote as death?

"Why did you only write to me once? And then the shortest note?"

She shook her head. "I had nothing to say."

"Some people take several sheets to say nothing,—my sister, for instance."

"I can't do that."

"It's just as well," he said. His manner was different from what she had expected. The old eagerness had vanished, the old impulsive vehemence. Yet she did not feel any the more secure, nor was she certain what the change meant. With that uncertainty upon her she did not dare to meet his eyes.

"Tell me," he said, "what's been going on while I've been away. Are things brighter?"

An indrawn under-lip and another shake of the head answered him. The slight wind that rippled about her seemed to carry to him the fragrance of wood-violets. It was only the thought of Cathcart that held him still.

"Never mind," he said; "there's always a way out."

She turned upon him a glance which opened a gulf between them.

"There's no way out."

After all, he knew but little of her; he realised it in a half-hearted way; he even had an idea that she stood somewhere above him. Certainly she had shed some of the current commonplaces of

The Yeoman

life. Yet in her expression there was something like a challenging defiance, he thought. Still, he kept himself in hand, only saying: "I hope you'll find yourself wrong."

She would not discuss the question with him; she spoke of it now to no one but Margaret, and to her only as a matter beyond mending. It was not that she lacked the faculty of hope; it was merely that she had, in certain directions, found opposed to her the unscalable wall of circumstance. Eustace did not yet wholly realise the possibility of such an obstacle. She moved towards the downward track.

"Don't go yet," he cried. "I want to tell you about all sorts of things,—about Italy."

He plunged into a running account of their journey, speaking well, and with enthusiasm, of the places he had seen, and the people, and how all the time England had been in his mind, and how favourite bits of it continually obtruded themselves as background to scenes which needed no imaginary setting. Dorcas listened to him for a time with acute sympathy. Just so, she thought, would she have felt; just so would her little world, so vitally known, have thrust itself in upon the strangeness of the new and unexplored, like a loved hand touching her in the darkness. But soon she ceased to follow him; only words here and there struck out sudden lights, and these shot through her musing like alien sparks. He talked on to hold her there. The things of which he spoke

The Yeoman

receded, in the mere recital of them, to a distance fantastically remote. He had been dreaming for three months; here he was again in that old charmed circle of the Cup, and not alone. He wondered at his even voice, at his power to control it against the urgings of a clamourous heart. The recognition that it was controlled made it waver. He paused for a moment. Then he spoke of Florence.

"That little seal," he said; "—you wrote and thanked me for it.—I bought it in a tiny shop in a side-street. The old man had a tray of such trifles. I took that up, and a ray of sunlight, the only one in the place, fell on it. I saw the dove flying and the waves below. It made me think of you."

He saw that her hand was at her bosom. She was listening to him again, but her eyes were looking seaward with an intentness which made his follow her gaze. There was nothing out there,—nothing but three fishing-boats gliding out into the west. She heard the carol-singers under her window.

"It wasn't much to send you," Eustace went on, "but it took my fancy somehow. Christmas over there wasn't like Christmas. I hated it."

"You weren't alone," Dorcas said.

"Alone? No; but that didn't make any difference."

"I wish—" she began,—and then, "why did you send it to me? It wasn't fair!" She met his eyes

The Yeoman

at last and he wavered under their open scrutiny.
“It wasn’t fair!” she repeated.

“Why not?”

For answer she snatched something from her breast and threw it on to the grass at his feet. Then she ran down the path without a backward glance.

Eustace picked up the seal. Attached to it was a scrap of snapped silk cord. Both were warm and had the scent of wood-violets.

Chapter XXIV

The Blow Falls

DORCAS had acted upon an impulse which left her no time to consider its wisdom. It had been a motion for escape, an effort to break a link, trifling though it was, which might be held as in some way binding her to Eustace. The cry of unfairness expressed her feeling literally and poignantly. Yet her feeling towards Eustace was not one of repulsion; she was drawn to him as before, she experienced a joyful glow at the thought of his constancy. It could not be otherwise; love cannot be ignored by such natures as hers; it was this acceptance of the fact of his love which had impelled her to wear the trinket near her heart. Her return of it to him was at once a recognition of his affection and an indication that she could not accept it as in any way holding her. But he had seen that she drew it from her bosom,—there was the folly of her act. Her flesh tingled to think that at that moment he might be nursing it against his lips. She was confounded, thrilled, abashed, by that possibility.

As she neared the farm, the homelessness of that home of hers brought the sting of tears to her eyes. To cross the threshold of the house after an hour's absence was to encounter, for the hundredth time, the brooding terror. Without, she could feel herself part of the world of wide horizons; within, she was confined to the limits of a darkened cage.

The Yeoman

She turned aside to the cottage to see Bess and Benjy.

Job was there as well,—at that hour she had not expected to find him. He had a great placard spread out on the table before him, at which he was staring intently, following the words with a slow forefinger. Bess, with arms tightly clasped, was rocking herself to and fro and shaking a melancholy head at Benjy, who had a picture-book open on his knee.

“Ah, ‘tis bad, miss, ‘tis bad,” said Bess, “an’ what we’re to do, He knows that sends such trials to us.”

“What’s bad, Bess?” Dorcas asked. Bess dropped her hands on to her knees and gazed at the girl open-mouthed.

“Doän’t ‘ee know, then?”

“Still, ‘ooman, still!” Job said. “ ’Tis like this,” he continued, addressing Dorcas. “I were i’ Mel-worthy to marnin’, an’ zeed wold Cox, the bill-poster, tarr’ble busy wi’ a girt paste-pot. ‘What be’t all ‘bout, Tom?’ I zaid. ‘Bout?’ ‘er zays, ‘you did ought to know what ‘tis ‘bout,’ ‘er zays. An’ ‘er gied this into my hand.”

Dorcas stepped to Job’s side and read: “Mel-worthy Farm. By order of the Mortgagees.” Then followed particulars of the property to be sold by public auction, at the Mart, Chesterton, on a day early in March.

Dorcas read every word before she moved or spoke. The accommodation of the house, the out-

The Yeoman

buildings, the extent of the property and nature of the soil, all were set out with hard and clear precision. It was like looking at a skeleton of one known and loved in life. Was that the farm, and nothing about how the sun came stealing to her window on a June morning, or how the daffodils made the little western copse-edge a fringe of gold? The joyful thought came to her that these things could not be sold. They were hers for ever, part of her life so long as memory had room for old delights.

" 'Tis hard," said Job, "aye, bitter hard. But we've a-zeed it comin', so it doänt vall so heavy like."

" Dearie, dearie me," wailed Bess, "what shall us do?"

" She's thinkin' o' havin' to turn out o' the cottage," Job explained.

" But perhaps the new people will take you on, Job."

" No, no. I'll have no meäster but a Winstone. And new volks doän't teäke on wold men."

" You'm so good's vive young woones," said Bess; "'ees, an' a head that mid 'a kept us all vrom ruin if you'd had your way." The new Bess had an extraordinary admiration for Job's powers.

" Tut, tut," he said. " My head's no call to be proud of itself,—'tis a bit hard to stand knockin', that's the best o't. . . . Zit 'ee down, Miss Dorcas. Yere we be in the blackest sort o' leäne an' no moon up. But teäke my word, there'll be a

The Yeoman

shinin' zomewheres avore long. 'Tisn't in natur' vor't to bide black!"

"That's a good word," said Bess, "not in natur', —there, there! Why, when we thought Benjy was gwine back 'twas the very time he was takin' a turn vor the better in his mind."

Job nodded approvingly. "'Tis God's truth," he said. He called the boy to him and perched him on his knee. Certainly the little fellow was more human, and in his eyes there was a glimmering of understanding, which, though often baffled, yet sometimes reached its mark. Dorcas kissed his cheek, and Benjy's arms closed about her neck.

"'Er's that lovin' you couldn' believe," said Bess; "'er'll cling an' cling!"

Dorcas disengaged herself softly and held one of his hands, stroking it gently.

"I'm glad we know at last," she said. "I'd rather have it all put down like that than just to sit still and be afraid it was coming."

"They auction chaps have wrote this down as a commojus cottage," Job said, smiling, "I didn't know 'twere that. There, they must zay zomeat."

"I rackon they'm paid extra vor the long words," Bess said.

"Is father at home?" Dorcas asked.

"I've not zeed un to marnin'," said Job. "You'd best leave un be, miss, vor a while. Poor soul, poor soul, an' he that zet upon the land!"

"I must go to him," Dorcas said.

Job looked at her doubtfully. He was not sure

The Yeoman

that Richard would be thankful for his daughter's company. As for sympathy, he felt that his master had no use for that.

"'Ees," said Bess, "you mid vind un open like vor a comfortin' talk."

"Maybe the 'ooman's right," said Job.

Dorcas went home. Richard was not there. On the hearth she found some charred pieces of paper, the remains of a burnt placard. Lizzie did not know where her master had gone; he had called out to her that he would not be back till late. The fear that he might not return at all gripped Dorcas's mind.

The day wore on slowly, rounding to twilight through changes which Dorcas watched unknowingly. Yet each was impressed upon her memory for the revitalising of that time in after years, and each yielded some simple solace to a spirit in sore need. Nature never forsakes her true children, and of these she was one to the depths of her being. It was otherwise with Richard. His love was so alloyed with baser stuff,—though noble, too, in its kind,—that its sweetesses were not for him. His passion recoiled upon itself, misinterpreted, rendered him incapable of saving action while it raised devils to tear him and to confront him with the urgent need of action.

When darkness had fully come Dorcas reverted to her first thought on hearing that Richard had gone out. Perhaps he would not return at all. It seemed not impossible that the sight of the damn-

The Yeoman

ing placard, publishing his ruin to the world, might have driven him into a fury which would end in self-destruction. Yet she had no active presentiment of death, nor could she reconcile her ideas of her father with any image of a violent end,—self-inflicted, at any rate. She sat still and listened; once a hand went to her breast to search for something that seemed missing. Her fingers dropped to her lap. The ticking of the clock was a mechanical voice that meant nothing,—it was less than a dreamer's babble. She supposed that the old clock would have to go with the rest,—everything would have to go. This reminded her that it was the day for winding it; she gave it life for eight days more, wondering whether it would be as truthful to strangers as to her.

The slow clink-clank of it from the reverberating wooden case set her nerves on edge. Yet to stop it,—there might be death in that, and absolute silence would be unendurable. Lizzie had gone to bed; nothing short of some violent physical disturbance could keep that healthy young animal from sleep. Besides, sales or no sales, she was to be married in May. Beyond that she didn't see very far. To do her justice, she didn't see beyond at all.

The hands pointed to close on ten o'clock when Dorcas set the door wide open and drew back the curtains. The outer silence met the inner, subdued it, flooded it, bringing in airs impregnated with a sense of stirring sap and of the sea. A wan-

The Yeoman

ing moon lit a chain of cloud-ripples to a semblance of ribbed sand wet from the ebb. Earth was toned to gray and black. Dorcas breathed more freely with the letting in of night.

She heard Richard's step, and his hand at the gate. Her natural impulse was to run to meet him, clasp arms about him, and pour out her sympathy in little tendernesses. But that repressive atmosphere which was her home air held her back. Even to go so far as the door might be a mistake. She ventured it, however, and met her father on the threshold; she reached to kiss his cold cheek. While he threw off his coat she closed the door and curtains.

"Dear father," she said; "I've seen it,—I know—I'm so sorry. We must make a fresh start."

He murmured something about Bristol and crowded streets,—faces, faces, and they all knew.

"Have you been to Bristol to-day?" She was busying herself about his supper, which was already set, altering the position of things, trying to attract his attention.

"For the last time," he answered. "It's all up; those devils'll give me no more grace. . . . But they shan't have the land,—I've sworn it. On my knees, that night, I swore to God—"

He was no longer speaking to her.

"Can't we begin again in a small way, father? Some day we might get the old place back."

"I tell you I'm not going to give it up."

Dorcas, for the moment, had forgotten that she

The Yeoman

was to be superseded by another woman. Her "we" included only herself and Richard.

"But won't they—" she was going to say "turn us out," but stopped before the words were spoken.

"Your friends have done well by me," he said. She did not answer his sneer.

"Well!" he continued. "A set of sneaking hounds, by God, wi' their noses in the dirt!"

"Don't," Dorcas cried, "don't, father!"

"And you've run wi' them. Father! I'm no father of yours. Go to them; they'll take you in."

"Are you going to turn me out?"

"I'm done wi' daughters."

"Will—will Mollie be better to you than I've been, father?"

He looked at her with smouldering eyes. Something plucked at his heart, only to be thrust aside in bitter mockery.

"She'll maybe breed me a son," he said, "and I can leave the name to someone honest. I don't want women; it's a boy I want to rear to hate his father's enemies. I'll teach him to spit at them. He'll shame them to their faces. If he's only a labourer crawling about the land he'll trap them somehow and bring them down. . . . You, you're not my blood!"

The intensity of his rage and hate struck Dorcas dumb for a time. This was madness beyond her power to touch. In her father's eyes she was worthless, a burden to be shaken off. And with that knowledge there rushed in upon her so acute

The Yeoman

a sense of injustice, so piteous a pang of wasted sacrifice, that her own anger leapt to flame, and she cried out:

“Thank God I’m not your blood, if it means such wickedness as that. You’ve done them wrong enough already! Even your son would see that if you told the truth!”

He stared at her in a gloomy wonder. She pressed a hand to her breast, breathing feverishly.

“I know,—that night,—the fire, when you wouldn’t help!”

They started up together, face to face. Each saw in the other’s eyes an expression untranslatable, a meaning drowned.

“You put that down to me! I never set foot near the place. You, you——”

Dorcas did not hear the last word. The hand which once before had been raised to strike fell upon her forehead. She lay along the floor quite still.

Richard sat and watched her until his anger cooled to a numb fear. If he had killed her, Dorcas, his little maid—no, not his, but still Dorcas, the child he had loved after his fashion,—if he had killed her,—well, he would go with her, that would be fair enough. She had accused him of setting fire to the dairy! Why, he had never had a thought of such a thing. Was that why he struck her? He was not sure; he could not be sure of anything tonight. Lying there, so very quietly, she looked more like the child he remembered long ago. He had not seen her lying asleep for years. Asleep?

The Yeoman

An ugly mark was showing on the fairness of her skin.

He dropped to his knees beside her and opened her dress. The scent of wood-violets! Yes, she always had that scent about her, made, he remembered, from an old receipt of her mother's. He put aside two ends of black silk cord,—it looked as though something had been wrested from its hiding-place. He slipped his hand down to her heart with a feeling of reverence he had never experienced before. It was beating quietly. He bent lower and touched the livid bruise with his lips. Then he drew her into his arms and cherished her till her eyes unclosed.

They unclosed, and shut again. She was dazed. Arms were about her; a dull ache ground into her brain. She raised a hand to her forehead and touched the throbbing soreness. All came back to her.

“Father!”

“Hush!” he said, and tried clumsily to rock her to and fro. She relapsed into a weakness from which she emerged to say again:

“Father!”

“I struck you,” he murmured.

“It was my fault,” she said. “I should have known that you'd never done what I accused you of. . . . Oh, father, father!”

That weak cry shook him terribly. It was the voice of a woman, and his child.

“I deserved it,” she went on. “Don't fret about it. Kiss me.”

The Yeoman

His obedience, his eager passionate obedience, was the triumph of her weakness. Tears came with divine refreshment.

He drew her to her feet and led her to a chair. Then, with hands that stumbled at their work, he bandaged up the hurt. The unnecessary pain he gave her she bore smilingly. Whatever might come after, here, at least, was something for memory to recall. They were nearer to each other than ever before. The man was utterly overcome.

"You'll not think too much of it?" he asked.

"It's all forgotten," she answered, clinging to his hand. "Now, take me upstairs."

He did not notice the assumption of authority; but to see him quietly obey was a rare delight to Dorcas. Her mother had never dared to do more than vaguely suggest.

He left her at the door of her room with another kiss and an added plea that she would not lie awake. She promised to go to sleep at once, like a child. Nor, indeed, was sleep long in coming to her. The pain assured her of the reality of what might else have mocked her as a dream.

Richard's anger burned against himself in a fury of remorse. But still his mind could not escape from its iron groove, and he saw even in his blow the malignant influence which haunted him. But the hand which struck the blow he beat against the wall till the blood came,—his idea of justice demanded some such physical atonement.

Chapter XXV

The Brothers

THAT same night Steve was awakened from his first sleep by Ford's voice.

"Wake up, old chap. I want to talk to you."

"Fire away," said Steve, doubling the pillow under his head. "Pull up the blind, will you? We don't want candles."

The light of the waning moon made a pearly glimmer in the chamber. Ford stood for some minutes gazing at a chain of cloud ripples that seemed a mystery of suspended motion. Out there was the primitive quietness of great spaces, unwalled, majestically vast. The four sides of a room enclosed no part of that elemental peace.

He turned from the window and faced the bed. Steve was blissfully conscious of relaxed warm limbs and the imminence of sleep.

"Do you think it possible," Ford asked, "for a man to love twice?"

"Certainly."

"But is it the square thing?"

"That would all depend upon the circumstances, wouldn't it?"

"In my circumstances, say."

Steve sat up and clasped his hands behind his head.

"It would be perfectly right," he said.

"Not disloyal, you think?"

The Yeoman

"Not in the least. You see, the living must always come first,—that's fair enough. And in a love matter there are two living to the one dead."

He spoke in a matter of fact way which concealed his surprise. He wondered what woman could have rekindled for herself the affection which had seemed to die with the dead girl. Perhaps Dolly. It was a chance to make Steve hug himself for fear.

"It used to seem to me at one time that a man couldn't love twice, and it's rather humiliating to find a beautiful idea wrong."

"But is it really a beautiful idea? Or suppose we grant that it is, isn't the other more beautiful? The fact is, one must love something alive, if one's alive oneself. And this doesn't wrong the old memory. I can imagine that the two might help each other. Why, with a man like you I'm sure they would."

"This is very comforting talk," said Ford. "I've been worrying over the thing for a long time; I wish I'd spoken to you about it before. You understand the kind of difficulty I've had? It wasn't that I doubted the new love, but I had a fancy that the mere fact of loving again at all argued a weakness in a man."

"I see," said Steve. "And it was a very noble fancy, but mistaken. I'm sure I'm right. I can see the thing plainly enough. Go ahead, I say. It isn't good to look back too much."

"I believe you're right."

The Yeoman

After a long silence Ford left the window and sat down on the edge of Steve's bed.

"But supposing that to be settled," he said; "there's still a lot left, for I've held myself in so tight that Dorcas can't have much notion of what's in my mind."

If he had said Dolly Steve would have been less taken aback. He felt that the fates were playing with marked cards.

"If you'd only told me earlier!" he said. "The other day, just before we came back,—" He paused, in doubt as to whether he ought to proceed.

"Yes?"

He had gone too far to get clear.

"Eustace told me that he,—well, was in the same condition as you."

"That's bad," Ford said, and added, "but I'm not surprised."

The silence that fell between them lasted for so long that each had time to travel far. Ford was hard hit; to be so robbed of treasure for the second time sent him into waste places. Steve was bewildered between brother and friend. But his sense of fairness made the way clear at last.

"It's like this," he said. "So far as I can gather it's a one-sided affair. I don't know, but I should think your chance is as good as his. And then with you there wouldn't be the same difficulties, it would be plainer sailing. He'd have to fight his people."

The Yeoman

Ford drew a deep breath which indicated intense relief.

"I'm sorry for Eustace," he said, "just as I was sorry for myself a moment ago. Though if we're in the same boat, all's fair. . . . Would Eustace have the courage to carry the thing through?"

"I don't know," Steve said, rather hopelessly. "In some ways he's plucky enough,—in personal courage."

"That isn't much good here."

"No," Steve assented. "Poor Eustace! He broods about it. Cathcart found it out somehow and it was he who suggested the going away. Of course, from his point of view, that was quite right; Cathcart's always right."

"I don't believe Dorcas would ever consent," Ford said. "The more I think of it the more I'm convinced she wouldn't."

"Not even if she loved him?"

"Not even then. She has a wonderful sort of pride."

"Let's hope she doesn't love him, then. Personally I don't believe she does. That's what bothered me. Now I'm glad to think it. After all, old man, you must come first with me."

Ford patted Steve's knee through the bedclothes.

"Good Steve," he said; "good Steve."

"But, Lord, I'm sick to think of Eustace! He doesn't seem like other fellows. He's like Richard in a way,—when he gets an idea into his head, there

The Yeoman

it sticks and he can't get away from it. All the time we were together I could see something was wrong,—then on the last day it came out."

Steve proceeded to explain how it had come out, and he received Ford's congratulations with a dignity which only the moonlight made possible.

"I decided long ago," Ford said, "that Dolly and you were made for each other. Neither of you could escape. . . . Won't Richard have been mad to-day?"

"When I saw that placard stuck all about the place I felt inclined to tear it down. Dorcas will have something to bear."

How much, even as they spoke, and how borne, nobody would ever know.

"Poor child," said Ford. "A brave, sweet soul, Steve,—perhaps braver than we think. Not perfect, though, thank God. . . . It's cruel to have to let this sale go on, but it seems best now,—indeed, it can't be helped. But I'll see her before it comes off. You were talking of difficulties a moment ago. Suppose things happen as I wish, won't there be fearful struggles with Richard?"

"Dorcas might go her own way, and I think she would. So far we haven't seen her under the influence of an outside love. It would be a hard fight for her, but could there be any other end? My idea is that she's a girl who would follow her lover through fire."

"I'm glad you believe in her."

The Yeoman

"I believe in her out and out." After a pause Steve said:

"I can't keep Eustace out of my head. The question is, should I tell him of this new turn in affairs? I feel that it would be fairer to speak, and yet——"

"Do just as you think well," said Ford.

"It may be the best thing for him, after all. If you succeed, he'll get over it somehow. On the other hand, if you weren't in it, he might do something wild. He's rather muddle-headed when he gets excited. Perhaps we all are."

"I'm afraid we are," said Ford.

"The devil of it is that things are messed up so easily. You can never straighten out a mistake properly. I shouldn't wonder if the world were run more by mistakes than the other things."

"That's a dangerous sort of theory."

"I don't see that the theory matters much," said Steve. "It's the facts that count."

Ford laughed.

"That's not Cathcart's philosophy, is it?" he asked.

"Cathcart's not a philosopher."

"What is he, then?"

"A priest, to begin with. After that, as fine a fellow as ever stepped. He's a man of the world, too, but as tender-hearted as a girl. One would be inclined to think he was wasted down here, if one didn't know the influence he has. He was ambitious once; but that's gone."

The Yeoman

"Will he be against you when you speak?"

"I think not," said Steve, "I think not."

Ford went to his own room and left Steve to consider the new aspect of affairs. He was on Ford's side, not only because he was his brother, but also because he recognised him as the better and stronger man. Yet his heart was sore for Eustace, who had come into his life at a time when the roots of friendship strike deep or not at all. He saw in the friend an incapacity for endurance whose opposite was so strong a characteristic of the brother. The one was shaken by passion to gusty impulses, the other grew strong under it to influence and control. Ford had been through the deeps where stars are lost in whirling blackness, and had emerged to find himself master of his human estate; Eustace had felt only the outer fringes of storm. That these two should desire the same woman struck Steve as an indication of the haphazardness of life; whereas, as a matter of fact, it was merely a practical example of the working of the simplest of all laws. He returned to the thought of Dolly's perfections to usher him to sleep.

Ford found himself possessed by an unusual serenity of mind, an engrossing quietness. His decision was made, his questionings hushed. The past was luminous with a memory of infinite sweetness, which held no reproach. He was able to draw near to that memory and take counsel with it, being assured at last that love for the living need do

The Yeoman

no wrong to the dead; nay, rather that the one gained truer perfection from the other, and that out of such sorrow sprang a stronger shoot of joy. To realise this was at once nobly humbling and divinely comforting. It put his spirit in tune with heights and deeps.

Chapter XXVI

The Sacrament of Penance

WHEN Dorcas awoke it was to a confused sense of pain and happiness; but the pain was slight, the happiness exhilarating and new. In the slow piecing together of impressions which follows such an awakening she was primarily conscious of a burden removed, a terror dismissed. She ached for her own unjust suspicion. If a blow could so cure a more deadly hurt it seemed to her that violence was no ill matter. Yet as her mind cleared she recalled that pitiful, groping penitence which had followed it,—a humiliation so complete that she could not think of it without tears. It was a great price to pay for a moment's loss of control.

There was no room in her heart for a bitter thought of her father. She did not even conceive that she had anything to forgive. The danger was that he would see differently with morning eyes, and thrust their reconciliation aside as a weakness to be forgotten. She lay dreading this, taking no count of time, though the sun was shining across a bed which was usually, at that hour, smooth and vacant.

The door was opened softly. Richard entered on tiptoe. She turned her eyes on him with a welcoming smile and spread her arms for an embrace.

“Daddie!” The old name was reborn in a flood of thankfulness.

The Yeoman

“Hush, you must keep still.”

“I’m quite well,—quite, quite!”

He touched the bandage.

“Does it hurt?”

She strained him close to her heart again.

“No, no!”

He raised his head slowly from the sweet warmth of her bosom in a kind of wonder. She was something altogether new to him, a something mysterious and strange. How was it that she had grown to this? His mind was obscured by fleeting phantoms; there were some that mocked and some that laughed and some that passed with averted faces. He had to banish them with a strong effort before he looked into her eyes again.

“Dorcas, you’re a woman grown!” And then he cried out, “You’re my blood, you’re my blood!” and reached out shaking hands to touch her wet cheeks. “God forgive me, I’d no thought to hurt you—God, God!”

“I know, I know. Oh, don’t think about it; let’s forget.”

He drew himself up and nodded vaguely. It was no expression of his bursting heart.

“I came to say,” he said, “that the doctor’s down below. I fetched him this morning. Shall I send him up now?”

“Oh, father, there’s no need for any doctor.”

“Yes, yes, there is.” If he did not spare others, he certainly did not spare himself. Dorcas ap-

The Yeoman

preciated what that journey to Chesterton had meant for him.

"Must I see him?" she asked.

He nodded again and left her.

She was thankful for an interval that gave her time to compose herself. The man of the previous night was the man of the morning. He had not changed. It seemed so wonderful that she was constrained to reassure herself by touching the bandage. Her love went out to him in a yearning that had in it something of a mother's passion. She beheld him as a child learning from her lips that ritual of affection which is essential for human need,—how essential let its absence prove in the record of maimed lives. All fear left her; she was lifted up to see in his ruin the gateway to a house of peace. Now all other misunderstandings would vanish; she was wrapped about with glowing joy. She realised herself as a creature desirable, with strength to rise and strive. It was as though some magic medicament had given sight to her eyes and knowledge to her heart. Such moments have an exaltation almost terrible, too fervent to maintain the skyey heights.

Doctor Stanton, who came up the stairs with a great bustle and clatter to signal his approach, was dazzled by the radiant face that welcomed him. He set down his familiar bag of instruments, opened it, groped inside, and snapped the lock to again before he could say more than a hasty good morning. His thought was,—“These women, these women,—

The Yeoman

Lord, they're marvellous; human, too, but doing nothing according to any reasonable rule. Now, here's this girl——”

“ Doctor, I don't really need you at all,” Dorcas said.

“ I've heard that story so often that I take no notice of it.”

“ If the least little thing 's wrong with me father makes so much of it.”

Stanton let this surprising statement pass unheeded.

“ You certainly look well enough. Come, let me see what this bandage hides. So . . . very neatly put on for an amateur.”

Dorcas was dreading the question, “ How did it happen? ”

“ These falls are often very awkward,” said the doctor, calmly. “ There's no chance to save yourself.”

She drew a deep breath which Stanton perfectly understood.

“ Down you go,” he continued, “ and then you see stars and lightning and a wisp of moon all jumbled up together. I came a cropper myself once and cracked my skull a bit. It's my belief the crack never closed properly. . . . Ah, a nasty bruise, but nothing serious,—hardly any inflammation. This is capital. We'll keep it bandaged for a day or two, though.”

She watched him soak a piece of lint in a lotion which he assured her was the best in the world

The Yeoman

for taking the sting and colour out of a bruise, and then he came to her bedside again to bind it on. Perhaps his fingers, delicate and soft, lingered a little over their office, perhaps the pulses in the firm wrists beat with a little more than professional ardour. It was not often that his skill was exercised on a head so beautiful, and never on one so well-beloved. To have it there under his hands was a trifle to be thankful for, to know that he could ease its pain a greater thing to him than to save another's life. And the little doctor was conscious, too, of that new spirit in her which flushed her cheek and deepened the clear wells of her eyes. "Kick 'em," he thought, "beat 'em, then say you're sorry, and they blossom into something that we men can't understand."

When he had finished she breathed her thanks. There was a flutter in her throat.

"You'll be all right in a few days if you don't excite yourself," he said. "And when I say that I mean it. Don't worry about this wretched sale."

She shook her head. "I won't do that."

"I've seen it coming for a long time, and no doubt you have, too. It may not turn out so badly, after all."

"I don't mind it a bit."

"That's the way to look at it. Stick to that."

"I mean, of course, that I don't mind it for myself."

The Yeoman

"Yes, yes, I understand," said the doctor. He fixed his eyes on the instrument bag and shifted slightly in his chair.

"Your father's a good deal over-wrought," he said. "Any man would be in the same circumstances. I should try not to let him be alone too much."

"Is he ill?"

He met her startled glance with a quiet smile.

"Not ill exactly,—no. But nerves are queer things, and it's just as well not to give them a chance to break loose."

"Can't you do something for him?"

"I'm afraid medicine's not much good; besides, he wouldn't take it. He'd pitch it out of window, wouldn't he?"

"I think I could coax him to take it," Dorcas said, strong in the idea of her new influence.

"Well, well, we'll see. I'll tell you what I will do. There's really no need for me to see you again, but I can pretend there is. I'll come every day or so and keep an eye on him. I shall be able to tell pretty well how things are going without his suspecting."

Stanton's offer was more than disinterested. To see Dorcas once, and touch her, was well enough, but to return again and again to that sweet contact did not present itself to him as a thing to be desired. Not that he doubted his own self-control,—that was inflexible. But drafts on such strength leave a more than physical weariness.

The Yeoman

"Doctor, you're kinder to me than I deserve," she said.

"Why will folks talk nonsense?" he asked. "It's my business to exercise my profession. Mayn't I do it without being overwhelmed with thanks? On my word, it's enough to make a man turn grocer."

Dorcas laughed at this return of his old manner.

"You'd make a very bad grocer," she said.

"I don't know about that. My grandfather was a grocer, and he was a better man than I shall ever be. He left half his money to a hospital,—to encourage the family, I suppose. . . . Good-bye."

He was out of the room before Dorcas had time to realise that he was going.

She did not hear the front door close until half-an-hour later. No doubt, she thought, Stanton was talking to and watching her father at the same time. But he did more than that; he offered to lend Richard sufficient money to clear himself, which would practically have left him as poor as in student days, for Stanton had never been a great collector of fees. The offer was refused, though with a sudden warmth of appreciation which rather surprised the doctor. After all, he thought, this Winstone was not all iron. But his keen eyes observed much that he did not like,—a gloom relieved by erratic flashes that left it deeper than before, an inner concentration as of one toiling, toiling to unravel the inscrutable. The indications

The Yeoman

were of nerves strung to breaking, of a mind labouring in the deeps.

Richard did not tell Dorcas of Stanton's offer; indeed, it hardly remained in his memory. He was too much occupied with the barren problems which beset every turn of his thoughts. Dorcas attempted to lead him away from them, even to call forth a tenderness which might relieve him by simulating weakness. And the tenderness was there, ready to her summons, though, as it were, the mere alphabet of it. He was too old to learn the graces of that fine language. Yet he strove after them pathetically, trying to mould himself to his new idea of the girl.

She early discovered that only towards her had he changed. Her vision of his total regeneration by means of her overflowing love soon grew dim, though not wholly eclipsed. He would not discuss the question of his attitude towards the other Winstones. That, it seemed, was immovable. The mere mention of their names breathed coldness upon an affection too young to bear it. Therefore she desisted from direct appeal in that direction, trusting to the leavening of time.

For a week Stanton came to the farm every day; after that the pretence of necessity could no longer be kept up, and he made his final farewell. He reassured Dorcas by saying that he apprehended no immediate danger of a breakdown. In his own mind he considered that a breakdown would perhaps relieve, more effectually than anything else,

The Yeoman

the strain which kept Richard so pitifully rigid. He knew that such a condition could not last.

During those days Dorcas did not set foot out of doors, nor would she see anyone from the outside world. Twice, during her father's absence, Ford called; twice he received the same answer from Lizzie, mysteriously conveyed: "Miss Dorcas were that took up wi' business she couldn' zee no woone." And in a lower voice, "She weren't not to zay tarr'ble wull." This was disappointing, though not surprising. Ford went his way impressed by an image of sorrow very different from the real Dorcas of that time.

She held herself aloof because of that mark upon her which signified so much. She could not lie to Ford, and to his inevitable question she would have had to answer truthfully. Rather than incriminate her father she let Ford go, rather than say a word about him that might be misunderstood she felt she could keep silence for ever. Certainly the new growth of love in her was wonderful, most pure and selfless. She had to make up for all those years which had passed flowerlessly; she had to gather up and lavish on the broken man all of which he had robbed himself and her in the past. He did not wholly understand it, but he accepted it with an unquestioning humility. During those lonely wanderings about the land which had become his only occupation he often found her name upon his lips; he spoke it aloud with blessing. Sometimes she slipped between him and his black-

The Yeoman

est thoughts like a moonray across a pit's-mouth. There were moments when he had to touch her to assure himself that she, too, was not one of the presences which haunted him.

She had let Ford go, but she nursed the memory of his retreating footsteps. She longed for the time when she should be free again to go out on to the downs and revel in their glorious liberty. The sea called to her at night across that green barrier with a voice that had never before called in vain.

During this period of her captivity Eustace had been made acquainted with the matter of the brothers' conversation. He received the news so quietly that Steve imagined he had weakened in his purpose, if, indeed, it had ever matured to earnest purpose at all. The subject, however, was too delicate for discussion between them. Nearly every day, in all weathers, Eustace was out in his boat. Cathcart encouraged him to take hard physical exercise,—he could think of nothing better. Eustace had become a mystery to him, or so much of a mystery that he felt he had lost the true soundings of his character. To acknowledge this was a severe check; it almost induced him to take his pupil's father into his confidence. Indeed, he might have done it if Mr. Hamer had not forestalled him by communicating his own suspicion of some love entanglement. The old man, it appeared, had fretted himself into a nervous illness over this suspicion; yet he would not speak to

The Yeoman

Eustace without confirmation. That confirmation Cathcart guardedly supplied.

"For God's sake, Cathcart, don't let our name be soiled," Hamer said. "It's a good name and a clean one. I'll speak to him."

"Not yet," Cathcart pleaded. "Give him a chance to come through it without more pressure. It will hurt less afterwards. You know how I love him?"

"Yes,—I trust you,—I know how you love him. But never forget he's the only one to carry on the line."

"No. I'll never forget that."

On the evening of the day which saw this understanding between Hamer and Cathcart, Richard returned from Chesterton in better spirits than he had shown for some time.

"That's over!" he said, when Dorcas had performed the little offices of welcome which he had once rejected.

"What's over?" she asked, standing before him.

"That marriage business."

"You don't mean you've been married to-day?"

"No, no, nor ever shall be. It was all a mistake. I don't want a son, Dorcas."

"Am I enough?" she cried, clinging to him.

"Yes," he answered, folding his arms about her. "Yes, I want no other woman in the house."

"But was it right to give her up for me?"

"There was no love on either side, so there's no loss to either. 'Tis over and done with, and glad

The Yeoman

they were to see the last of me. They think, you know," he added, "that I'm going to turn out of this."

There was the marring note; it rang through everything. Dorcas dropped her head against his shoulder.

Chapter XXVII

On Board the Eileen

THERE came a day when Dorcas could go abroad without fear of questioning eyes; the mark of the blow had faded. The return to the open-air life which she loved stamped the hour which saw her free as one of most gracious benefaction. She went back to nature with fresh capacity to breathe its finer airs. Of old she had often fled to it for refuge, for the gift of oblivion; now she met it as a friend to whom she could speak of the new life. There was, of course, some sadness in her heart. It was hard to stand on the ridge of the downs and look back across the house and farm-lands which represented all she understood of home, and to know that strangers would soon sit beside the hearth and till the familiar fields. It was hard, but the sharpest pain was already overcome. The uncertain future did not daunt her. There was something godlike, because childlike, in her reliance upon the unknown. She held out hands, as it were, pleading that though much must be taken from her, the better things might remain. What the better things were she partly understood, though she hardly realised that her prayer included all of worth.

The afternoon was chilly, with a wind from the north west. A great bank of heavy cloud, sombre as a foggy twilight, moved slowly across the sky.

The Yeoman

Where its shadow fell the sea was cold grey, before the encroaching sweep of it the waves ran in long green undulations. The line of division, continually advancing, had the blurred look of ripples in a muddy pool.

Dorcas watched sea and sky with a delight sharpened by her enforced absence from them. No personal trouble had ever been able to blind her to the beauty of the world. And now that she was aglow with a thankfulness rendered the more poignant by thought of what had yet to come, that beauty made an appeal to her so thrilling that it touched the founts of both tears and smiles. She overflowed with a universal charity which included all created things. It was an effort of the soul towards God.

Standing out against the green, and fleeting towards the grey, she saw the white sails of a little yacht. Her eyes followed it instinctively as one follows the flight of a gull. A figure in the stern, when the boat was abreast of her, stood up and beckoned. A moment later the sail slackened and the boat swerved inshore. Below there was a rock landing-place which ran sheer into deep water.

She obeyed the signal, and began the descent of the narrow pathway which led down to the landing-place. The zig-zags of the steep track made the journey long and slow. In the mood which had possession of her she could not churlishly refuse to meet Eustace, and leave him waiting fruitlessly for her coming. If he had merely signalled and stood

The Yeoman

out for her reply she might, she thought she would, have answered differently. Yet she was not sure. Prudence, if it be a virtue, is of slow growth, and makes its appeal mainly to grey hairs, often to their discrowning. Dorcas was filled with nobler and kindlier emotions.

For the last fifty yards she was in view of the boat. It was moored to an iron-tipped wooden stanchion let into the rock. Eustace leant against it, his feet resting on a ledge cushioned with seaweed. His eyes were fixed on the horizon, not on the path down which Dorcas was to come. She noted this, and wondered at it, but was not displeased. A displaced pebble clattered on the landing-place. He turned to reach her a hand for the last jump.

"I always look up and expect to see you on the downs when I'm passing," he said. "I feel like a sailor spying for a landmark. Where have you been all these days?"

"At home," she answered.

"Yes, but not indoors?" He scanned her features so closely that she was afraid he might discover some trace of the mark. The idea sent the blood pulsing to the place.

"Yes, indoors," she said.

"Have you been ill?"

"A little, but now I'm well again."

"I can see that," he said, "You look splendid. This breeze would blow life into anyone. My little ship knows all about it."

The Yeoman

"She's not so tiny as I thought she was."

"She's safer than many bigger craft,—rides like a cormorant. Just step on board and feel how she springs under you. Come along."

She stood beside him in the boat. It brought the sea nearer. The drumming surge of it round the coast made an uplifting exhilarating music that was full of the things which cannot be spoken. It seemed to Dorcas that it must continually be crying some message to the land which the land never understood. Perhaps it was a secret to unseal the doors of mystery for ever,—nature's supreme word. She followed the tumultuous sea levels, running on and on into the stormy west, with eyes that half anticipated some abrupt and glorious revelation.

"Have you sailed much?" Eustace asked.

"Only in fishing boats."

"Good sailing, too, but nothing to what the *Eileen* can do. She's a fairy,—they're like plodding men."

"How you must love her!"

"Yes, she's my truest friend, next to Steve. She's never angry or unjust. Besides, she's mine, and no one can say that of any human being in the same way. The *Eileen* and I understand each other." He patted her mast as he might have patted a dog.

"Shall we go for a run now?" His voice sounded indifferent; his left hand was playing with a pulley-block.

The Yeoman

Again her eyes went westward. The refusal that rose to her lips was checked by a fiery rent in the cloud curtain from which a shaft of light sped to the boat's side. His gaze followed hers.

"You can't refuse that invitation," he said; "we'll sail into the west and find where that flash came from."

The same fancy had been hers. He did not wait for her to speak, but hoisted sail and cast away from the mooring. The little craft leapt forward, rising and falling with the swell, in the track of the western beam. The hissing ripples widened out behind her and broke softly against the deserted landing-place. As they drew away from the coast neither looked up towards the downs, so neither was aware of a man standing there who cried out in the wind's teeth: "Come back, come back!" and again, with hidden eyes, "Dear God, go with them, and guard these poor wild children of Thine!"

Eustace held the sheet with a single turn round the cleat; the wind was strong and still rising. The tiller was against his left side. Dorcas sat opposite to him in the well of the boat. The *Eileen* bounded on like some joyous creature which feels the delight of liberty in veins throbbing to bursting. The water streamed past her delicate sides in ridges jewelled with breaking bubbles. At one time she seemed to lean over to drink, with the gunwale awash; at another to stoop an ear to the sea's

The Yeoman

whispering. The slant canvas strained at the blocks; the ropes sang shrill music.

It was long before either spoke. Dorcas, with chin on hand, her hair in part loosened and rippling with the wind, was for a time wholly engrossed with the fascination of the sea-magic. It held her in a breathless wonder. Familiar as she was with it, that wonder was always renewed when she felt the actual uplifting of waves. Vastness became something concrete, a piece of infinity made visible.

The single rift in the west had opened to a lurid sun-setting; the one track was swallowed up in dazzling reflections as from a burning city. The boat cut through the brightness as though it were eager to reach the splendour's source. They sailed through a shifting, leaping, golden tumult which was full of voices. The *Eileen* herself was like a ship of fire, her mainsail glowing like the white heart of a furnace.

Dorcas raised her head and looked at Eustace; the strange light was on his face. She turned aside and thought of land.

“We must soon turn back,” she said.

“When we have reached the west.”

“Then there could be no turning back.”

“What matter? So long as I have you—”

He fastened the sheet.

“Why should you go back?” he asked. “There’s nothing to return to but misery. Leave all behind.” Both look and voice had changed. A shiver passed through the girl. There was a

The Yeoman

masterfulness in his tone which it had always lacked before.

"Why should you go back?" he repeated.
"Here we are, free. Look at me, Dorcas."

She looked, and saw the little seal in his hand. He kissed it and put it in his bosom.

"From heart to heart," he said.

"No, no!" she cried. She hid her eyes in an agony of doubt. The sea's loneliness overwhelmed her.

"You must escape all this wretchedness and ruin. I'll take you away from it. Somewhere we'll be happy."

She raised a face to him stricken and full of pleading.

"Eustace, take me back!"

"Never!" he said. "When you came on board to-day, I knew that I was going to win. Love always knows."

He leaned forward to her with such passion in his eyes that for a moment she could only gaze into them, speechless. Pity dared not speak before that undisguised recklessness.

"I am your guest," she said.

He drew back and altered the boat's course slightly.

"Did you think I could forget it?" he asked. She breathed more freely.

"I shall not be going back to unhappiness," she said.

"Then you'll come with me. See, I've set her

The Yeoman

head to Wraymouth. From there the world 's before us!"

"I'm going home,—to father."

He shook his head.

"To be treated like a dog, and after all turned out for another woman? No!"

"You're wrong, you're wrong!" she cried.
"All that's over. We only misunderstood each other. Now everything's put right."

A shower of spray fell between them. The beginning of twilight hovered over a purpling sea. Still far away the esplanade lights of Wraymouth glittered.

"Eustace, for the love of God, remember what you're doing. Think!"

"I've thought till I'm sick of thinking." Her helplessness, her spray-wet cheek, the momentarily hopeless attitude into which she fell, pulled at his heart.

"This is our one chance," he pleaded. "It came from Heaven. You won't repent. My love will make up for all."

The assurance of his tone struck fire from her.

"Your love!" she cried. "What sort of love is it? Shame to it! Our chance? Yours, to show what the love you talk of is worth."

He held the boat doggedly to her course, though the taunt stung him to the quick.

"You loved me once," he said. "It's only since Ford came—" The name made her rigid. He

The Yeoman

observed the change and plunged on. "Steve told me all about it,—it was honest in them both, I'll say that!"

Her brain whirled. Those few words revealed more than she could grasp at once. Slowly their meaning came to her in misty outline, slowly she saw herself the unconscious centre of a drama part of which was then in action. It was not remorse that shook her; it was not terror that wrung out the cry which startled Eustace. It was the full light of comprehension breaking on a soul that had not dared to know itself.

She rose and once more begged him to put the boat about. He, too, rose; they seemed to stand poised above destruction. With a sudden desperate movement she passed him and jammed the tiller round. Instinctively he freed the sheet and let the boom swing across. The *Eileen* shipped a broadside, staggered in her swirling revolution, and nosed forward on the return track. Five minutes later she resigned the tiller to Eustace.

"You can trust me again?"

"Yes."

There was no further outbreak on his part. It was she who spoke, quietly, pleadingly, begging his forgiveness if at any time she had misled him. Her voice sounded faint and far away; wind and sea dwarfed it to a thin echo. It fitly represented the unbridgeable gulf between them. And Eustace knew what he had lost, and burnt with shame of the madness that had overcome him. That she

The Yeoman

should beg his forgiveness crowned his humiliation. She spoke no word of reproach.

"It's all over," he said, "I've lost. I deceived myself. There's no blame to you. . . . Look." He tossed the seal into the sea. "I give it to another friend."

Her head drooped. It was possible now to let pity have way.

"I'll land you in the Cove."

She thanked him.

"Dorcas, try to think of me always as I am now. Forget the folly."

"Yes, yes."

From the increasing outer tumult the *Eileen* passed over the bar into the quiet water of the Cove. Eustace slackened sail and ran out the anchor. He hailed a patch of blackness that moved steadily to the sound of oars. The boat changed its course, and drew alongside. Eustace sprang into her, lifted Dorcas to the stern seat, and told the rower to take her ashore. Then he returned to the yacht and began to weigh anchor.

"Aren't you coming, too?" Dorcas asked.

"I'm going to take her round to her own berth."

"Sea's heavy an' tide runnin' hard, zir," said the man. "Better let her lie yere."

"She wouldn't rest well here," said Eustace.

"Don't go!" Dorcas cried. "Don't go!"

"I must. It's safe enough. I shall be home as soon as you." He called to the man, "Off you go, Tom Chugg."

The Yeoman

The oars dipped. Dorcas could say no more. She could only gaze backward at the receding yacht until she saw that it, too, was in motion, standing out towards the bar beyond which the sea cried menace to frail ships. The hull vanished, the mainsail was grey against the black like the wing of a settling gull. Soon all faded into tumultuous darkness, and Dorcas crouched down in a shivering terror which took from her the power of active thought. She could see nothing but driving seas, and a solitary drifting speck carrying a burden too precious to be cast away.

Chapter XXVIII

The Eileen Again Sets Sail

THE grating of the keel on the shingle roused her. Chugg jumped into the water and drew up the boat. When Dorcas stood on land she felt like one who has basely fled from peril. It was only a momentary weakness.

"Is there any real danger out there?" she asked.

"Real 'nough, miss," said the man. "If so be he keeps his head he'll manage it. There, doän't trouble. What the sea wants it'll have, zoon or leäte. It's all wrote down vor us."

"Can anything be done?"

"Nothin'."

She left him, and walked rapidly across the wide strip of glimmering sand and pebbles to the mouth of the main street. The lights of the Ship Inn shone broad across the way; from the bar parlour came sounds of merriment. As she passed these ceased and a voice began to sing:

When the sou'-west blew, an' the sou'-west blew,
Oh she stood out brave to sea,
Wi' her hold tight crammed, an' a jolly crew,
An' her name was the sweet Nan-cee.

The chorus boomed: "An' her name was the sweet Nan-cee." Dorcas hurried on. She knew the ending of that song.

The Yeoman

Half way up the street she felt a hand on her arm.

"Where is he?" She looked up into Cathcart's face. "I saw you this afternoon," he added.

"He's gone round to berth the boat. He landed me in the Cove."

"Madness!" His hand still grasped her arm.

"I begged him not to go."

"Why didn't you prevent him?"

"I couldn't." She read consternation and indecision in his eyes.

"Forgive me,—I don't mean to hurt you, but—had you arranged to meet?"

"No."

"Miss Winstone,—I'm his friend, his friend,—what folly was it induced you—you surely knew—"

"I hadn't been out for days and days. I was very happy—I can't explain it all. We were away before I had time to think."

"He trapped you?"

"Not that!"

"You're generous."

"I speak the truth." She felt that Eustace was somehow on trial. It was only just that she should be his advocate. She felt no bitterness against him now.

"I believe you," said Cathcart, "I believe you. I was always sure that you were not to blame. He was rash, self-willed. What I want to know is—"

He paused abruptly, peering into the girl's face

The Yeoman

as though to read the answer to a question he dared not ask.

"I'm afraid," he continued, "that after to-night I may have only a memory of him to cherish. . . . God have pity on us all!"

"You think he'll be—" She could not form the terrible word.

"If it's God's will," Cathcart said more quietly, "that he should go from us to-night, I want to know whether we all may think of him as having gone with no stain upon his soul."

The words fell so solemnly that though Dorcas felt all the blood in her body leap to flame, she answered, as in the presence of death pleading dumbly for life's intercession:

"I'm sure he never thought of wrong."

The simple sentence might have served Eustace before a higher tribunal.

She was lifted by Cathcart's joyful expression into some knowledge of the depth of the affection which had prompted him to go so far.

"I can meet the worst, now," he said. "My soul thanks you, my child. You're true and brave."

He pressed her hand and went down towards the Cove.

Dorcas pursued her upward way with a cry in her heart for Margaret. She even spoke the name aloud as an assurance to her own senses. It was impossible for her to carry the burden of that hour alone, impossible to seek strength from any but a woman. She felt that if she merely stood still she

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would be overwhelmed. Cathcart's apprehension had confirmed her own fear to an unbearable degree; the wind shrieked disaster. She could not escape from the lash of self-accusation. To condemn herself seemed simple justice. Even the recollection of the unheroic part Eustace had played had no power to clear her sight in a season of such intense emotion. If he were to die, it would be a sacrifice to her. The woman's heart of her could not conceive that weakness often travels under strength's ensign.

Now that she also knew herself, pity became an overflowing spring. She clung to the thought of Ford like an exile to the memory of a home-star. He was a point of rest in turmoil. She saw how high a place he had occupied in her inner life, and welcomed his image as her conqueror. If her interpretation of Eustace's words had been wrong, still they had served to complete her knowledge of her own heart, to indicate its true thirst. She accepted that enlightening as irrevocable, whether it were to bear fruit or never come to blossom.

But of that she could not speak to Margaret; to her she would only tell that other story which had reached its end. Cathcart's words scorched her afresh with every return of them.

She asked to see Margaret alone. In the interval of waiting she became aware of the disorder of her dress and hair; both were stained with spray. She made no attempt to remove these signs of her voyage. They were convincing witnesses to her-

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self of a fact which might else have wavered before her as a fantasy. She touched her lips with the salt.

Margaret entered with light face and step. Happiness beamed from her.

"Dorcas, you kept Steve's secret well. Of course we guessed, but now he's owned up, as we used to say."

Dorcas threw herself into Margaret's arms. Dry sobs shook her.

"What is it, my dearie?"

"Let me rest a little."

Margaret led her to a couch, and there, sitting beside her, drew Dorcas's head to her breast. Her hands stroked the soft hair.

"Why, our girl has been on the sea!"

"Do you ever pray for sailors on stormy nights like this?"

"Surely," said Margaret. "Always."

"Pray now."

Her lips moved to the words, faintly heard by Dorcas:

"Thou, O Lord, that stillest the raging of the sea, hear, hear us, and save us, that we perish not."

The floodgates were unlocked. Dorcas told all, beginning with the incident of the afternoon. She did not spare herself, and Margaret, listening to the broken story, felt her love grow. That piece of passionate life aching in her arms represented much that was divinely human. She had no blame

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for Dorcas, recognising in her a spirit akin to her own, though more severely tested. Margaret did not sit in judgment on creatures needing comfort; her office was to console and strengthen. To this end she made no comment on Eustace's part in the affair, though in her mind he stood by no means blameless. Charity was the first and last word of her experience.

"Can we do nothing? It's awful to sit still. Think of his father and sister!"

"Dolly is here now," Margaret said. "You exaggerate the danger, my child."

"If I could think so!"

"Try to think so. If anything is possible, Father Cathcart will do it. If you like I'll speak to the boys. They need only be told that Eustace left the Cove at the beginning of the storm."

"Tell Steve."

"Ford has more head in a crisis."

"Ford, then." She only breathed his name.

"Look at me," Margaret said softly. There was no ambiguity in the gaze which passed between them. Both understood.

"We won't speak of it now," Margaret said. "So much must happen first. . . . Dorcas, remember that you're not alone; don't try to bear all your own trouble; don't go away and eat your heart out. Promise!"

She promised; already the tumult was subsiding under the influence of Margaret's compelling sympathy. There was no estrangement between them.

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If her story, brought to the test of that pure heart, was accepted without censure, Dorcas could not fail to be eased. It was the appeal of woman to woman which alone could lift her up.

"Will you see any of the others? My husband?"

"Only him."

"May I tell him just enough to make him understand? Not all, of course."

"Yes."

David was called by Margaret from a circle of supreme contentment to the room where Dorcas waited. A few words from his wife on the way made the situation clear to him.

"That fellow Eustace," he said, "always perplexed me. He had no balance. Now, Dolly's as firm as steel. Is there anything in the girl's fear, do you think?"

"It is shared by Father Cathcart."

"He's level-headed enough. What muddlers some folks are! Here's a young man playing the fool to a pretty tune! As for Dorcas, well, on my soul, I consider she's behaved splendidly. Think of the chance she had!"

"It didn't strike her in that light," said Margaret.

"That's just where she's great. . . . What I'm to say to her I don't know. This is a kind of thing I'm not accustomed to!"

"You'll manage very well."

He managed so well that in half an hour Dorcas

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felt a different being. David's practical wisdom and optimism cleared the atmosphere.

" You women," he said, " always make too much of things,—perhaps it's well for us you do. Dorcas has nothing to reproach herself with. If a young man yields to a sudden impulse and sails away with a girl,—why, there's nothing terrible in that, so long as she makes him see his folly. . . . You've had so much to trouble you, my dear, that this, following the rest, seems blacker than all. But there's light ahead. That sale, now,—don't think of it!"

" That hasn't troubled me," said Dorcas, " since father changed. We're happy now."

" He'll have to change a little more yet, won't he, Madge? Now I'll take you home. Both Ford and Steve shall go with Dolly. If Eustace hasn't come back, trust them to do what's best. I daresay he's sitting cosily at home, thinking over his folly,—repenting it, too, I hope."

So he ran on until he and Dorcas set out together.

" There's no more than half a gale blowing," he said, as the wind met them. " The *Eileen* could weather that."

The sky was clearing, but the night was dark. The sea clamoured from a gulf of blackness. Up from the coombe came the mellow wind-borne chime of the church clock. It struck nine. The thought of her father waiting and wondering hurried Dorcas's steps.

Chapter XXIX

The Sea's Pity

LONG before the brothers and Dolly reached the Castle, Cathcart had been there. There was no *Eileen* at her moorings, no Eustace in the house. If nothing had happened the boat should have been berthed an hour ago. Still, there was hope that Eustace might have found the set of the tide too strong, and so stood away from shore. Cathcart, therefore, did not communicate his fears, but set out for Melworthy again, taking the way of the downs.

He could hardly be said to hope at all. From that windy elevation the might of the unseen sea appalled him,—unseen, and yet dimly suggested as a weltering chaos over which brooded unimaginable terrors. He found himself thinking of Eustace as of one already beyond his reach. He prayed for him as for one in extremity, then as for one already dead. He was agonised with the idea of his soul's passing in utter loneliness. The memory of all the years of their loving intercourse he gathered up and presented in one passionate appeal as representing the fruit of a human need which could not be denied continuance of growth. There was no mere rhetoric in his cry, “My life for his!”

Down at the Cove there was no news of the boat. He went into the Ship and questioned the men

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in the bar-parlour. Only Tom Chugg knew anything, and he repeated what he had said to Dorcas.

"Will half-a-dozen of you volunteer to take a boat out and beat up and down the coast?" Cathcart asked. "We might pick the *Eileen* up. Perhaps she's disabled."

Chugg said that for his part he'd go, though to his mind what was ordained to happen would happen. That seemed the general opinion; but in spite of it five more readily consented to turn out.

"I'll go with you," Cathcart said.

"You'd best bide ashore, zir," said Chugg. "'Twill be colder and wetter out there than i' the Ship."

"I don't mind that. You can put me where you like,—I won't be in the way."

"As you'm minded," said Chugg.

Cathcart despatched a messenger to Mr. Hamer with a pencilled note, stating his apprehension temperately, and adding that he was on the point of going out with a party of volunteers. This note was delivered a few minutes before Dolly and her escort arrived.

There was no difficulty in boarding the fishing-boat, nor, indeed, any danger in the whole undertaking. Many a time the men had gone out to the fishing grounds in worse weather. Yet they all went about the business with unusual seriousness, taking their tone from Cathcart, realising also for themselves that the loss of Eustace would be a deadly blow to the family to which they had owed

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allegiance time out of mind. The sea always took its toll, but it was generally content with lesser lives. They seldom grumbled at its filchings, feeling, perhaps, that it might take vengeance in further battered bodies. But the women were not so reticent; theirs was the wailing part.

When the bar was crossed, Cathcart, wrapped in borrowed oilskins, kept eyes and ears on the stretch. The others did the same. At intervals one of them sent a great cry into the night. No answer came. The light at the mast-head shot a feeble glimmer before their bows, revealing running seas that curved and broke in maddening iteration,—all different, yet all alike. Now and then, far out to sea, the lights of an ocean-going steamer moved across the waste. As time dragged on Cathcart began to feel the numbness of conviction take hold of him. At the end of the third hour he made no protest when Chugg suggested that they should put back.

The news had spread; a little crowd on the beach awaited the boat's return. Apart from the main body was a group towards which all eyes were directed from time to time. Murmurs of sympathy broke out, were caught up, repeated, and died down into unnatural silence. There was no need to hail the boat for news; the crew's dumbness proclaimed that if they had found anything it was the worst.

Cathcart was the first on shore. From the boat he had picked out the group which was the heart

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of the gathering. Steve carried a lantern; the upward light struck out the pale features of the Squire and Dolly.

"You've seen or heard nothing?" Hamer asked.

"Nothing," said Cathcart. "There wasn't much chance, but it was better than sitting still."

"The wind's dropping," Steve said. "He'll soon be able to venture in. I don't see why such a fine sailor as Eustace should have got into a mess. He had only to keep his head, and I never saw him lose it in a boat. He always did the right thing pat."

"Those are good words, my boy," said Hamer. "Perhaps we're mistaken, God grant we are!" He stepped forward and addressed the crew.

"My men," he said, "I'm heartily thankful for your help to-night. I'm proud to live amongst you."

Tom Chugg, as spokesman, said "'Twere nothin'. They were main sorry they hadn't caught the vish. But there, the sea were the sea!"

"If there had been more for you to do you would have done it. Tom Chugg, your hand!"

Each of the men grasped hands with him in turn. Some of the women standing round whimpered. One, with a child in her arms, broke into loud sobbing.

"She losted her man a month back," some one explained.

The Squire turned to her and laid his hand on the child's head.

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"Poor little soul!" he said, softly. Then to the mother, "He shan't want,—don't trouble about that."

He rejoined the others. "Now let us go back," he said. "We can do nothing here."

Cathcart singled out Tom Chugg and drew him aside.

"You know the set of all the currents, Tom?"

"Aye, zir."

"If a man were lost not far from shore, where would the body be washed up?"

"Wi' the wind in theäse quarter we mostly looks to vind 'em on the Shell Beach."

Cathcart hurried after his companions. When he drew level with them the squire caught his arm and leaned heavily upon it.

"This is too much for your strength," Cathcart said.

"My spirit's strong. I can bear all."

"I dare not speak to you of hope."

"Have you none?"

"I can't deceive you. I'm ready for the worst."

"It's cruel, Cathcart. . . . Out there, alone, my boy!" He stood for a moment gazing into the blind night. "I've been a proud man, Cathcart,—he was proud, too. I wanted to see the name carried on. A good name shouldn't die. . . . Only one son, Cathcart. . . . I can't think he's gone. This morning we had a long talk together. He spoke of you. 'I'm afraid,' he said, 'old Cathcart hasn't been rewarded for all

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his trouble over me. But he knows I think the world of him.'"

"I always believed that," said Cathcart. A strange peace had come into his heart, a kind of brooding restfulness which lifted him above the tumult of sorrow. It was as though the mortal part of him, with all its half-realisations, its perplexities, its gropings, were laid aside. His spirit burned serenely, without any obscuring of earthly mists. He could fancy that he heard voices, very far away, ineffably sweet, hymning the blessedness of death.

All the rest of that night the mood remained with him. Ford, who had been watching at the little harbour, went home sorrowfully with Steve. The Squire and Dolly at last retired to sleeplessness and prayer. But Cathcart, when the house was still, sat or walked with no sense of weariness, revolving in his mind every circumstance of his intercourse with Eustace, calling up memories of the child to correct his impressions of the man. He had always been lovable, always wayward, always a creature whose horizon was filled with some one thing. There was the weakness. He could not be brought to see, to understand, the inter-dependence of life; he would not face the multitudinous minor effects which spread from a single issue. If he grasped the nettle at all it was from impulse, not reason. It was better, Cathcart thought, that such a soul should have escaped the world's appeals. His friend now shone before him unsoiled. His chief pain was for the father. But in him was a steadfast-

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ness jointly reared on faith and noble pride. He would endure greatly. Besides, he had another child.

With dawn Cathcart set quietly forth upon his errand. The thrushes were singing,—first the awakening stir, then the two first drowsy notes, then the full clear fluting. There was as yet no colour in the east, but as he advanced day flashed up behind him and threw brilliant glimmers, ethereal messages, far out to sea. A long slow swell was all that remained of the night's storm.

He crossed the head of the coombe and struck down towards the Shell Beach before the village was awake. The morning stillness had a quality of subdued life which eased its loneliness. Cathcart walked with downcast eyes. Only when his feet were on the crunching white shells which gave the beach its name did he let his gaze run forward to the sea's edge.

And there, as though it waited for his coming, he found what he had set out to seek. The young face was beautiful in death, serene, untroubled, unmarred by any sign of struggle, radiantly pale in the pure light. The sea had used him tenderly, and having done its work, had brought him gently home.

Then, and only once, Cathcart broke down. He threw himself beside the body, kissed the lips and eyes, and murmured wild appeals into the deaf ears. All the first terror and desolation of death overflowed him. His love went out into darkness on

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the impossible quest. But soon the awful silence, the more than mortal dignity of the dead, forced him into calmness. Beside that God-like mystery he felt the littleness of all human protestation, all human yearning. Reverently upon the quiet brow and breast he made the Sacred Sign, and commended the deathless spirit to the Eternal Heart. A few moments later Steve knelt beside him.

Chapter XXX

The Gift of Rest

THE news came to Dorcas not as a slayer of hope but as a confirmation of the assurance of the night's vigil. She had known that Eustace would never steer the *Eileen* into port. His fate was written for her clear reading in every circumstance which she recalled, or so it seemed to an imagination feverishly alive. Could she have saved him? Only by a sacrifice to which death were an easy matter. Nor, in the intervals which reason snatched from emotion, could she condemn herself for the last scene. She had merely followed an infallible instinct in the fire of a crisis, and come forth victorious. The destruction that fell upon the vanquished could not be laid to her account, nor was it inherent in the conditions of the struggle. But such gleams of philosophy fell coldly on a bruised heart.

It was Job Flower who first brought the news. He was working early, from sheer habit, in an upland field, when he saw a group of men moving slowly along the Melworthy road. Four of them were carrying a stretcher; behind it walked Father Cathcart and Steve. As they neared Job, Father Cathcart had hurried on in advance, "wi' a feāce," Job said, "tarr'ble solemn, yet bright like, zeāme's I've a-zeed in picters. There's woone in the chapel up to the Castle wi' just that look. 'Tis woone o'

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they saints, I rackon." From a straggler far in the rear he learnt what burden they bore. Job told the story to Dorcas and Richard in an awed murmur. Richard was quite unmoved. They might have supposed that he did not hear save for his comment, "The lad was over young to die." Dorcas had half-feared an outburst of savage rejoicing.

Later in the morning David came to acquaint her with fuller details. He admired her calm bearing, knowing that it did not spring from indifference. He himself was more outwardly disturbed than she. He begged her to go to Margaret. "There's comfort there," he said, "for any sorrow. Not that you've any need to be greatly troubled, but I know how women feel about such things." She told him that at present she preferred to remain quietly at home,—her father needed her. But she sent a note to Margaret. "It is terrible," she wrote, "but I was prepared for it. I see more clearly than I did last night. I will come to you soon. To-day I don't feel guilty, only very tired, and there is so much to think of. They tell me he looked quite happy."

In the afternoon Father Cathcart saw her. She had been much in his thoughts. He was glad to find that he could regard her entirely without prejudice,—nay, rather with particular solicitude as an instrument of the divine will. "We have both lost a friend," he said. "It is as a friend that we should cherish his memory. We cannot doubt that



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he will reach happiness. It is that belief that makes the sorrow I have just left beautiful. Mr. Hamer bears the blow nobly; his daughter leans upon him,—there is the true woman's instinct. She makes him think for her and so saves him."

"Tell her," Dorcas said, "that she acts rightly,—say that I know it."

"I think you need no help from me,—perhaps from no one. You are strong."

"Not strong!" She checked a shudder. "Only trying to remember that I have to live!"

"Yes," said Cathcart, "you have to live. Keep that in mind, and strength grows. So many people forget, and remember only that they have to die."

"Death is easier!"

"Perhaps,—but death is not the end." He left her with a blessing which sounded strange, though it communicated to her a sense of security such as one feels under the spell of exalted music.

Hourly, from that day, she began consciously to take possession of her woman's kingdom,—timidly at first, with many falterings, though surely and in perfect lowliness of heart. The discipline of sorrow must either develop or dwarf the spirit,—it can never leave it as it was. With Dorcas the process was one of growth. She could read the past in a new light which was free from distorting mists or reflected colours, and she was able to grasp the essentials for future need. But it was not wholly sorrow which enabled her to advance; there was

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also the influence of the revelation of her own heart.

In the week which elapsed before the day of the sale she was constantly with her father when he remained indoors, and sometimes by his side when he tramped about the land. But that he would not often permit, though he refused her gently. In everything save the one matter they were very close together. He drew up schemes for the future management of the farm which he submitted to Dorcas with childish pleasure; he had a plan for the rebuilding of the house which would give additional room for some mysterious industry he never named. These moods were followed by lapses into utter gloom and silence, during which he would either walk alone or sit for hours staring into the fire, sometimes holding Dorcas's hand. He would never discuss what they were to do,—there was nothing to discuss. The land was his.

On the night before the sale they sat up together till past midnight. It was not the last night they would spend in the old home, for they were to remain there until the transfer was completed; but it was the last night which could have the old flavour. Richard was sensible of this, yet firm as ever in his belief that he was secure.

"They shan't rob you," he said, drawing Dorcas to him, "they can't. We'll never go. It's Winstone land."

"I don't mind going, father. If they've the right

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to take it, let them have it. We shall be together still." He shook his head.

"They've no right," he said. "If any one dares to come in at that door——"

"Hush, hush! You wouldn't hurt them."

"I'd kill them."

"Then what would become of us?" He did not answer her.

Long after she had gone upstairs she heard him moving about below; he had insisted on being left alone. She did not sleep until she heard his bedroom door close. When she came down in the morning he had been out an hour. Her fear was that he might have gone to Chesterton to attend the sale.

As she stood hesitating in the doorway, scanning the country for a sign of him, Job Flower appeared. He pointed towards the rise of the downs.

"Meäster be up there," he said.

"I was afraid he might have gone to Chesterton."

"He wun't go nigh there. I'll keep an eye on un. Let un bide alwoän, poor soul; 'twill do un good to walk an' walk."

"Have you had breakfast, Job?"

"I've no mind vor't to marnin', Miss Dorcas."

"Come in and sit down. Perhaps I shan't have another chance to ask you."

He took his place at the table with extreme shyness; on such occasions he needed the support of Bess.

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"Doän't 'ee wait on I," said he, "doan't 'ee, now. I'll just pick a bit quiet like." He ate sparingly and with slow and respectful deference. Now and then he smiled encouragingly at Dorcas.

"You do teäke it main well, miss," he said, "aye, you do stand up to't vine. Trouble met that way's half done wi."

"I don't seem to mind it now, Job."

"I allus knew that meäster'd meäke up vriends wi's little maid. 'Er were never so hard's 'er zeemed."

"I didn't understand him once as I do now. It wasn't all his fault, Job."

He sat back and looked about the room.

"If any but a Winstone lives yere," he said, "I've a notion the walls'll vall down vlat. I've year'd o' that happ'nin'!"

He rose and picked up something that stood behind the door. Dorcas looked and saw a gun in his hands.

"I s'pose meäster had a vancy to shoot to marnin'," he said, indifferently, "an' then vorgot to carr' out the gun. Tidn' safe to have un twoäded; you mid be dustin', or someat, an' let un off."

He took out the cartridges and put them in his pocket, carefully keeping his face turned from Dorcas.

"Please take the gun away, too," she said.

"I'll teäke un whoäm and clean un," he said.
"The barrels be so black's a chimbley!"

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When Job had gone Dorcas took down another gun from its rack in the kitchen and hid it in her bed-room. Then she went out to look for Richard.

After half-an-hour's search she came upon him in the narrow cart-track where Job had found him on the evening of David's home-coming. There was such a light of exultation in his eyes that she drew back in fearful wonder. He walked with a quick movement wholly different from his usual plodding step. His glance passed over her without pausing; he did not see her.

He saw nothing, indeed, but visions of endless prosperity. The labour of his life had all come back to him a thousand-fold in teeming harvests and crowding herds. He saw fields spreading away out of sight whose golden riches were all to be gathered up for him. The land knew him,—that was it. He had always known that the land was alive and understood its friends. He remembered dimly a time when he had worked in vain, but that must have been in some other life. Now he could hardly contain his joy.

As he neared her again Dorcas stepped into the track and met him. He looked bewildered for a moment, then put his hands upon her shoulders and searched her face.

“Why, father, you mightn’t know me!”

He touched the place of the blow.

“Does it hurt?” he asked.

“No. . . . No. . . . Will you come home now?”

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"I can't," he said, "I can't—" Then, with an eager smile, "Do you want me?"

"So much, daddie!"

"Then we'll go," he said. "You're alone now, aren't you? Sometimes I forget."

As they went he talked of the good fortune that had come to him. He appeared so happy that Dorcas could not bring herself to break his dream. Only now and then a shadow darkened his brows, he paused abruptly, muttered a word or two, and returned to his former manner. The danger Dr. Stanton had named was very near, but Dorcas was not afraid. She was assured that her influence would be able to guide her father, that her strength was equal to any call.

When they reached the farm he sat down quietly in his arm-chair and after a time fell asleep. It was a sleep of utter weariness, profoundly deep. The whole man relaxed. As Dorcas watched him she seemed to see the lines about his eyes and mouth soften gradually and almost disappear. No dreams harassed that consoling interval; it was a truce of God.

Two hours slipped by and still he slept. The hands of the clock passed noon; the sale was over. Soon news would come. Dorcas saw in fancy a hot-foot rider gallop through the outskirts of Chesterton and take the Melworthy road. Her little world stood still to watch him.

At one o'clock Lizzie came in to lay the table. Dorcas motioned her away. A few minutes later

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the girl returned to whisper in her ear that Job Flower was waiting to see her. Dorcas went out to him.

"'Tis over," he said, "I've just had word." His manner was mysteriously elate.

"Who's bought it, Job?"

"Meäster David Winstone," he answered. Dorcas expressed no surprise. "Er bid up an' up han'some. There, tidn' likely 'er'd be beat."

Dorcas was wondering how the news could be broken to her father when he awoke.

"They be comin' along yere now."

"Who?"

"Meäster David and Meäster Vord."

"They mustn't come in, Job! Father's asleep."

She ran round to the front of the house just as David and Ford reached the gate. David advanced with a face aglow with satisfaction. Her eyes passed him and flashed for a moment into Ford's.

"Father's asleep," she said, "we mustn't wake him."

"We bring good news," said David. "I've bought the place—not for myself,—I don't want it—but for him. Richard wouldn't have my help, but he must have the land. He'll pull things round again."

"I'm afraid when he hears. . . . Cousin David, he won't take it,—he can't. Oh, you're good, you're good, but how could we live on you like that?"

"My dear girl," said David, "you wouldn't be

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living on me. This place can be made to pay. Some day I'll take the money back. If a man can't help his own people what use is he?"

"I think we can persuade him, Dorcas," Ford said; "at least let us try."

"He's asleep," was all that she could answer. She was trembling.

"Are you afraid, my child?"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

She explained how of late he had wandered in his mind and how that morning particularly he had fancied himself rich.

"If that fancy lasts," Ford said, "we need let him know nothing for a time. But if he asks about the sale it would be best to tell him the truth at once."

A dog-cart drove up to the gate. Dr. Stanton handed the reins to his man and stepped out.

"I thought," he said to Dorcas, "that this would be a trying day for your father,—the shock and all that,—so I've come to see how he is." The little man was smilingly composed. "Asleep, is he? The best possible thing. I'll just wait till he awakes."

Dorcas looked appealingly to David. "Tell him," she said.

In a few words, and with much embarrassment, David explained to the doctor what he proposed to do. "Pure business, you know," he added, "pure business."

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"Sir," said Stanton, "if all business were as pure the world would be too good to live in. Miss Winstone, please to consider yourself under my orders. You will remain with your father till he awakes. If he asks any direct questions, answer them firmly and truthfully,—show no hesitation. If he asks none, treat him precisely as usual. I will wait somewhere near at hand,—perhaps it would be as well for these gentlemen to remain also."

Dorcas led them to the house and left them together while she returned to her solitary watch. It appeared endless, yet she would not have shortened it by a heart-beat. Each minute was so much oblivion for the weary man, so much hope for her. He might return to consciousness with a mind purged of madness, with a cleared vision capable of seeing the truth at last. He had changed so much to her that surely he might change to others. She began to believe that this wonderful balm of rest was working in some sacred way towards a new birth of his spirit.

His eyes opened. For a moment they rested on her quietly and contentedly, then the old haunted look struggled back into them. She could have cried out against the cruelty of recollection.

"What time is it?" he asked. She told him nearly three o'clock.

"I must have been asleep."

"A beautiful long sleep," she said, stroking his hand.

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"No dreams, no dreams. . . . Have you heard anything?"

"Yes."

"Who bought—" The unfinished question hardly reached her ears.

"Father, cousin David bought it for you. You're to keep the farm and pay him back when the good times come. They will come, won't they? Father, father!"

He had risen to his feet and was groping blindly towards the door.

"It's a trick to rob me! They're all thieves! When I was asleep—"

Dr. Stanton stepped into the room and touched Richard on the shoulder.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Winstone," he said. "There's no trickery about it. All's fair and above board."

Richard drew himself up and stared down at the doctor.

"I don't know you," he said. His gathered brows darkened over eyes that had an expression of bewildered searching.

"Father, you know me!" Dorcas cried. His face lightened; both hands went out to her. But before she could touch them he drooped sideways and fell into the doctor's arms.

"I was afraid of this," Stanton said. "Call the others, please. There's no need for me to tell you to keep firm. I learn from you. If this," he murmured to himself, "if this were only the end!"

The Yeoman

It was not the end, but what Stanton had feared did not come to pass. Richard struggled back to a twilight of life which was a fitting prelude to its close. His mind was almost a blank, though capable of a certain placid contentment which compensated for much vital loss. Only occasionally did he question Dorcas and then his form of words hardly varied.

"The old place is ours, all ours, isn't it?" he would ask; and her answer always satisfied him. He became a child in her hands, restless when she had to leave him for a time, welcoming her return with simple and most touching delight. His supreme trial had indeed resulted in the birth of a new spirit, of a spirit without memory. Terrible as it seemed, Dorcas was thankful that he no longer suffered. The wreck of the strong man was, as it were, sanctified by beneficent visitings of hitherto unknown influences; he blossomed in decay.

During these tranquil weeks Dorcas, too, blossomed, though into no sudden lavishness of flower. The growth was gradual, sure, deep-rooted, expressing itself in quietness and in peace. There was no word of love between her and Ford, but an understanding which satisfied natures disciplined to wait. Each knew all the other's story.

In mid-May Richard died. His last word was for Dorcas, his last gaze rested on the fields which he had loved with such a master passion. Something of that passion seemed to linger in the un-

The Yeoman

conscious eyes; the lids were closed over a vision of the farm-lands bright with spring.

For some months Dorcas remained alone at the farm, which Job Flower, to his proud delight, still managed for a Winstone. Then there came a morning when Margaret's eager hands adorned a bride.

"My child,—almost daughter now,—are you happy?"

The answer was sobbed forth upon her breast.

THE END



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The Bodley Head

67 Fifth Avenue, New York City

35 cents per Month. Annual Subscription, \$3.50

Three Months' Trial Subscription, \$1.00

Two Specimen Copies sent, post free, for 25 cents

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